Welford Beaton
EDITOR
Robert E. Sherwood
ASSOCIATE

HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

JUNE 20, 1931

Introducing a new Associate Editor
in the person of
ROBERT E. SHERWOOD

Film Firms Are Going Broke
Is Irving Thalberg Really A Genius?
We Call on an Aristocratic Cow
—By the Editor

Breaking Into A Picture Studio
Only God Can Make A Blonde
They Can't Fool Howard Hughes
—By Sherwood

Names and Some Hollywood Vanities
Walter Wanger and Ben Schulberg
—By Daugherty

Babel and Sound Effects
—By Trumbo

Reviewed in This Number

KICK IN
LADIES' MAN
MAD PARADE
STEPPING OUT
PARTY HUSBAND
THE MILLIONAIRE
DADDY LONG LEGS
UP POPS THE DEVIL

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Film Companies Are Going Broke

By The Editor

THE financial condition of the film industry constantly grows more desperate. Apparently nothing can divert a panic. The only thing that ultimately will restore prosperity is a return to the making of motion pictures, but as no one in control of the industry knows what a motion picture is, and will not allow those who do know to make them, the prospects of prosperity are remote.

The allied organizations of Warner Brothers can not escape bankruptcy. Always lacking picture brains, the brothers were saved from oblivion four years ago by a mechanical device—the sound camera. Since then they have been kept going by the impetus of money the sound camera brought them. Now they are running out of money. They have nothing left. The stock exchange flatters them by still insisting that their stock is worth something. In reality it is worth nothing.

Neither is the Fox stock worth anything. If the company were liquidated to-day the assets would not offset the liabilities and there would be nothing to distribute among the stockholders. Even its powerful banking affiliations can not continue to carry the load, for the basis of the company's worth is its ability to make pictures that the public will patronize, and it lacks such ability. More than any other company's was the extent of its surrender to the stage when the screen went talkie, and that has brought about its ruin.

▼▼ PARAMOUNT is in a bad way. It has to absorb tremendous losses, incurred by unwise financing, at a time when its product is failing to earn enough revenue to take care of the cost of manufacture and dividend requirements. It is continuing this year to make the same kind of pictures that reduced its profits last year. To make the right kind of pictures requires an ability that it does not possess and which it is making no attempt to acquire. It has a lean year ahead of it.

The only strength of the RKO affiliations is the fact that they have the Radio group as their sponsors. David Sarnoff and Hiram Brown are intellectual giants when there are financial problems to solve, but they are babies when they approach a problem that depends for its solution upon the degree in which the fundamental principles of screen art are reflected in a screen creation. The RKO end of their varied enterprises is selling screen art, but they do not know it. They think it is selling conversations. When the other enterprises are called upon to provide the millions of dollars that will be lost by making pictures that the public will repudiate, perhaps Messrs. Sarnoff and Brown will begin to ask themselves questions. In that lies RKO's hope of a prosperous future.

▼▼ UNITED ARTISTS is passing out of the picture. What Joe Schenck started, Sam Goldwyn will finish.

M-G-M is the only organization that has maintained a level of stability in its productions. It made the best all-talkies when the public was willing to accept such entertainment, and its troubles only are beginning. The weird extravagance of its production methods added to the loss of revenue for which its present pictures will be responsible, will make it as unsafe financially as all the other organizations. No one in authority in the Metro studio has picture brains.

Somehow or other I have confidence in Universal's ability to muddle through. Carl Laemmle has a lot of sense. He is used to having his back to the wall and has cultivated an ability to fight his way out. And I have confidence in Junior. He is in a tough spot. Apparently his father is the only one in the organization who wants to see him retain his job, and I hope the sense I conceded to his father is great enough to assure Junior's having a fair chance.

▼▼ HOWARD HUGHES is another in whom I have confidence. He is spending his own money learning the game, and he is learning it thoroughly. He is a brilliant young man who makes no outward show of brilliance, but who with stubborn persistency goes after results and gets them. I think Hughes some day will be at the head of a really big producing organization, and he will develop enough executive ability to make a good job of it. He should take over United Artists just before it reaches the point of final disappearance.

Columbia has the chance of a lifetime. The bigger organizations are too cumbersome to think. A young, alert organization like Columbia could put its pictures into the biggest theatres in the country if it only had sense enough to profit by the mistakes of others and make the kind of pictures the public wants. But no doubt Harry Cohn will continue to make the same kind of talkies that the others are making.

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Robert E. Sherwood

THIS *Spectator* introduces a new associate editor in the person of Robert E. Sherwood, playwright, one time editor of *Life*, perhaps America's foremost commentator on film affairs—in short, a distinguished man of screen, stage and literature.

My new confrere's writings on motion pictures have appeared regularly in lay papers and were written for laymen. It occurred to me that Bob Sherwood during the past dozen

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years must have stored up a lot of things that he would like to say to the people who make pictures. We talked it over, with the result that we have a new member of the *Spectator* staff.

▼▼ THE *Spectator* itself as an institution has no opinions. It hereafter will present regularly the opinions of three people, in order, myself, Sherwood and Dalton Trumbo. My only request to my associates was that they were to pan me on their pages when I write things they don't like. Bob Sherwood, the base ingrate, has started it already.

You will notice that with this issue the name of the magazine has been changed. Instead of *The Film Spectator*, we now have the *Hollywood Spectator*. We made the change to permit logically the inclusion in its pages of comment on subjects other than the screen. We have increased the size to provide room for contributions from our readers, and we hope that they will make generous use of our pages. We have changed the typographical appearance to make the paper more readable.

▼▼ MR. SHERWOOD is now in Hollywood and while he is here will give *Spectator* readers the benefit of such observations as he makes. When he returns to his home in New York, he will discuss Hollywood as he sees it from that distance and probably will include in his department expert comments on current stage offerings.

Our new associate editor still is a young man and what he has done so brilliantly in the past may be accepted only as an indication of what we may expect from him in the future. I am proud of the fact that I will be associated with him during his expanding years and that his best thoughts upon the subjects he will discuss will be available to *Spectator* readers. I am proud also of the fact that the *Spectator*, by persuading him to become a member of its staff, is instrumental in making him a part of Hollywood, even though he will reside in New York.

The *Spectator* welcomes Bob Sherwood cordially. I am confident that its readers will welcome him with equal cordiality.

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A Genius?

NICHOLAS M. SCHENCK, president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, says that if there be such a thing as a genius, Irving Thalberg is one. It does not require genius to make pictures in the manner that Irving makes them. After the last Novarro picture was previewed two reels were cut out of it and retakes were shot to patch up the hole. If those two reels should not be in the picture, a production executive of ordinary intelligence, much less a genius, would have known that they never should have been shot. The money that the reels cost should have gone to M-G-M shareholders instead of into the cutting-room rubbish cans.

▼▼ THE METRO method of making pictures is the most absurd that prevails in any studio. Directors are hurried, harassed and hampered by lack of money, but after a picture is shot unlimited time and money are expended in patching it up until it meets a certain entertainment standard. If this standard can not be reached, the picture is not released. By this method Metro avoids having absolute flops, but it does not avoid having gigantic losses represented by dead film in forgotten vaults.

No, not a genius. Any picture ever made by Irving could be duplicated for half the cost by anyone with a slight knowledge of production and a sound knowledge of the fundamentals of screen art.

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Silence

A CORRESPONDENT wants to know when I am going to cease insisting that Hollywood should make silent pictures again. I wasn't aware that I was insisting upon any such thing. I have been urging Hollywood to make *motion pictures* again. The only perfect motion picture is one that contains no audible dialogue or sound effects, though a motion picture of a sort can contain a little of both, but it is not a motion picture if it uses dialogue to tell its story. It is a photographed play, and the present financial plight of the film industry is due to the fact that the public has grown weary of viewing photographed plays.

When I say that Hollywood should return to the business that made it one of the outstanding communities of the world, I do not mean that it should go back to silence as abruptly as it left it. I mean that it should return to the business of telling its stories with the camera. This necessarily does not preclude the use of some audible dialogue. In the silent days we did not succeed as we should have in developing the titleless picture, and it is too much to expect now that we can develop screen art far enough to enable it entirely to eliminate audible dialogue. There is no reason why we should not use dialogue to displace the printed titles, but we should not use it beyond that point.

▼▼ THREE YEARS AGO when talking pictures first began to assume a definite form, I stated in the *Spectator* that the problem the sound camera presented was the judicious use of silence. Silence was and always will be the most valuable element of screen art, as it establishes the effectiveness of filmic motion and permits its function as the story-telling agency. When silence predominates in a film production, it enhances by contrast the potency of the spoken word. Talking pictures have lost favor with the public because they scorn silence and rely wholly upon the voice in telling their stories. Formerly the mission of the camera was to record action. Now its chief mission is to record conversations.

Dialogue has become an important element of our screen entertainment, not because it is a natural element, but because producers have given it a false importance. Despite the fact that it has brought the industry to the verge of bankruptcy, Hollywood still reaches out to the rest of the world for more dialogue writers to add to its distress. When a story is being put in form for shooting no consideration seems to be given to its suitability for presentation with a maximum of motion and a minimum of dialogue. As long as this folly is practiced the financial stability of the industry will be threatened.

The satisfactory form for the new picture is one that tells its story almost entirely with the camera, which has very little dialogue, and a synchronized musical score. If Hollywood would begin to make such pictures, prosperity would return to the industry. There are plenty of people in Hollywood who could introduce this reform and maintain it at a level that would earn the generous patronage of the public. There is no hope for it, however, while our present executives control production. To them, and to them alone, belongs the blame for the financial condition of the industry. The greatest proof of their incompetency is their failure to recognize that they are incompetent.

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An Alibi

THE GREATEST contribution that the general financial depression has made to the film industry's private depression takes the form of an alibi. Producers try to derive some satisfaction from the fact that as all business is bad, it is natural that theirs should be also. They know, however, that theirs is not a panic business. It was not affected greatly by former business depressions. Why should it be by this one?

Even if there were no general depression, the picture business would be little better off than it is at present. The fact that business is not good does not affect the public's taste in entertainment. The picture that would be a success in good times would be a success in bad times.

▼▼ EVERYTHING that I have said for almost three years about the folly of the producers in substituting dialogue for the camera as their story-telling medium, is proven to be true by the fact that the big baseball leagues are enjoying a season of real prosperity. The two are related in that both are amusements and business depression must affect both alike. Even in the hardest times, the public must have amusement. Heretofore pictures were selected. This summer baseball is getting the amusement money and picture houses are starving to death.

Give the public the kind of screen entertainment it wants and there will be no depression in the picture business.

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Television

WITH ONE of the most powerful financial groups in America interested in the development of television, we may take it for granted that the practical stage of the invention will be reached shortly and that it then will be possible for us to have a combination of sight and sound as entertainment in our homes. Already the same group has given us another development of its laboratories—the talking picture.

And as has been the case with the sound camera, I think we will find that its sponsors are devoting all their brains to the development of television and none to the development of the entertainment that it will provide. Television will be important only to the extent of its ability to entertain. At first we were interested in talking pictures solely because they talked. It will be the same with television. The Radio group is spending millions on it, but I haven't heard of it making an effort to learn what it should do to keep television going after it has been perfected.

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A Cow

ON A SUNDAY morning a few weeks ago I called on a lady, a most important and aristocratic lady of the Holstein family. It was on the ranch of Alan Hancock at Santa Maria. Corona—that is the name of the Holstein lady—looked at me with large and gentle eyes and seemed to be wondering why I was interested in her. She is the only intelligent-looking cow I can remember having met socially, and in my time I have stroked the necks of a great many cows. Whenever I get near enough to any animal to stroke it, my hands feel empty until I do. But it was not Corona's beautiful head, nor the velvet smoothness of her neck nor the puzzled depths of her intelligent eyes that drew me to her. Even while I was caressing the lady I was not sentimental. I was judging her from a commercial standpoint. Corona weighs seventeen hundred pounds. During each month in 1930 she produced twenty-four hundred pounds of milk—seven hundred pounds in excess of her own weight. That means a tremendous amount of butter, but I have forgotten the figure.

Corona is a useful citizen. She is a champion of something—of the world, I think. And, withal, she has feminine graces.

IN THE NEXT SPECTATOR

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We Acknowledge That We're Licked
Are Warner Brothers Through?
Folly of the Retake System
New York Salesmen Should Keep Hands Off
The Plaint of P. G. Wodehouse
Decent Hours for Studio Girls
Double-Feature Programs Inevitable
Lubitsch and Von Sternberg Score
—By THE EDITOR

More Scintillating Comments
—By R. E. SHERWOOD

Some Current Reviews
BY FRANK DAUGHERTY

Remarks Well Worth Reading
By DALTON TRUMBO

▼

Some Pictures Reviewed

Kiki
Secret Six
Vice Squad
Maltese Falcon
American Tragedy
Women Love Once
I Take This Woman
Forbidden Adventure
Indiscreet
Hell Bound
Night Nurse
Transgression
Lawyer's Secret
Smiling Lieutenant
Drums of Jeopardy
Young Donovan's Kid

Alan Hancock's General Manager Bachelder pulled her ears gently and spoke into them endearing things that real affection prompted. But even when her great and glorious eyes looked into mine I could not cease marveling at the fact that the dear lady presented to the world fourteen tons of milk during 1930.

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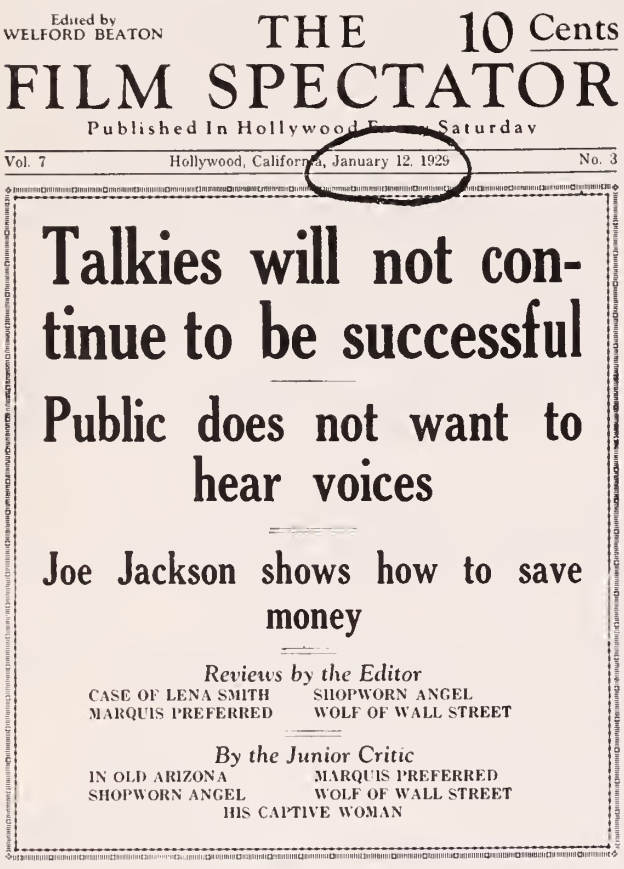
Executives

A WOMAN chides me. She writes from a New England town that (1) she reads the *Spectator*, (2) she sees three or four pictures a month, (3) almost invariably she enjoys all of them, and (4) if she could believe what she finds in the *Spectator*, Hollywood doesn't know how to make a picture anyone could enjoy. She wants to know what is the matter with which of us. Nothing at all, dear lady, nothing at all. No doubt if you had told me the names of



Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Talkies will not continue to be successful

Public does not want to hear voices

Joe Jackson shows how to save money

Reviews by the Editor

CASE OF LENA SMITH — SHOPWORN ANGEL
MARQUIS PREFERRED — WOLF OF WALL STREET

By the Junior Critic

IN OLD ARIZONA — MARQUIS PREFERRED
SHOPWORN ANGEL — WOLF OF WALL STREET
HIS CAPTIVE WOMAN

the pictures you enjoyed, you would find that I enjoyed them also. I do not abuse pictures as much as I do those who make them. Let me see if I can make my position clear.

When I criticise the industry as a whole I view its product as a whole. I thoroughly enjoy perhaps half the pictures I see, yet the industry's financial condition is desperate, which shows that I would be a poor judge of the screen's commercial welfare if my judgment were controlled by my personal tastes in screen entertainment. The public does not like as many pictures as I do. If it did, there would be no box-office slump.

▼▼ MY CONSTANT criticism of the film industry as a whole is based on the folly it has shown in putting itself in its present alarming position. All the existing financial distress could have been avoided and pictures could have sailed serenely through an untroubled sea even while the general business depression persisted. The industry had assumed enormous proportions by producing a certain line of goods—silent pictures. The sound camera came along and the industry began to produce an entirely different line of goods—talking pictures. There could be no quarrel with this if the level of the industry's financial condition had been maintained after the change of product.

But what do we find? Warner Brothers and Fox facing bankruptcy; Paramount so desperate for money that it is forcing its employees to lend it money. Such distress is general throughout the industry. The situation becomes more alarming when we realize that there is no relief in sight. The incompetent executives who brought the business to its knees continue in control of it. The pictures that almost wiped out the business last year, are being duplicated this year in all the Hollywood studios; the producing organizations will present again to the public the sort of entertainment it already has spurned.

▼▼ HOW COULD the industry know that the public would not continue to patronize pictures that told their stories in dialogue? you may ask. A fair question, but easily answered. If the executives, who are being paid the hugely grotesque salaries that make the film industry so ridiculous, knew anything whatever about the fundamentals of their business they would have known just what was going to happen. An executive's value to a business lies in his ability to look ahead. Our present executives lack this ability.

If they had no other way of foretelling what was going to happen, they could have discovered it by reading the *Spectator* of January 12, 1929. In it I predicted precisely what has happened.

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Salary Cuts

THE HEAD of one of the studios told me that salaries simply had to come down. He made a virtue of the fact that he uncomplainingly would stand a cut along with the rest of the studio personnel.

An actor on this lot received a salary of five hundred dollars a week for a year; worked for three weeks in one picture from which all his scenes were cut after the first preview.

An effort was made by this studio to raise to stardom two stage actors who proved to be such dead ones that their contracts finally were bought up. Cost to the studio—pure waste—$260,000.

▼▼ FOUR HIGH-PRICED writers worked for months on a story before the studio discovered that it didn't own it. Waste probably $50,000.

A picture, a pet production of the studio head himself, turned out to be so bad that it will not be released. Waste over $400,000.

I could continue to add things that I know of my own knowledge that would bring the waste for one year above one million dollars. The studio head is willing to contribute a

small percentage of his salary to make up this million. To offset the waste, which was due solely to his incompetence, he is willing that all the people on the studio pay-roll should contribute something from their salaries.

I think that is very decent of him.

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New Offices

BEFORE very long the *Spectator* is going house hunting. It needs a bigger office and it is going to seek one where offices aren't. It is going to find a bungalow on some quiet street—one of those Hollywood streets that consist of sunshine and flowers and lawns; and rows of architectural delights in which people live and are happy and healthy. The first feeling of rebellion that California instilled in me culminated in my decision never to wear a hat again until someone told me why I should. No one has. Since that time I have remained a slave to other conventions, but now I find myself rebelling against the one that demands that an office should be in an office building.

I want the young women who help us with the *Spectator's* business to sit by windows that look upon lawns and to breathe air that is scented by garden flowers. I want to take them away from streets that are clamorous with discordant noises and relieve their ears with the hum of bees. Instead of their vista being a building opposite with cells like theirs, I want them to gaze at bougainvillaea and gladioli and zinnias and other delights that the garden we'll have will offer them.

▼▼ AND WHEN visitors call upon me I want to take them to the shade of a tree in the rear and let them sit in reclining chairs and go to sleep if they want to while I tell them what's the matter with the film business. And I want a place to which Dalton Trumbo can bring his Airedale puppy and give me a chance to develop the great friendship with it that will be the inevitable consequence of our better acquaintance.

I don't know yet where the office will be, but it will be on a street where one can park in front of it and where we can scare up a bunch of kids for a ball game when there isn't much going on. Or even when there is, for ball games are important.

In these days of motor cars it doesn't make much difference where an office is. About the worst place I can imagine for one is in an office building.

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Stories

ANYONE who views cinematic conditions with any degree of intelligence would have considerable difficulty in determining which is the major asininity indulged in by motion picture producers. As each one is contemplated it looms so large that it seems to be the greatest. I find myself frequently about to start a paragraph with some such opening as "The greatest stupidity of the film industry—," but before I get the sentence set down I think of a score of other stupidities just as great, and I have to start off in some other way. Degrees can not be determined when the whole producer-mentality is so low. But let us take one stupidity that is not exceeded in stupidity by any other—the belief that there is a story shortage.

There is no reason whatever why one of the major organizations should buy another story for the next ten years. If it would train, and keep employed, writers who know how to put *motion pictures* on paper, writers who know the camera and the entertainment value that can be derived by a director from a well-written script, the files of the organization would provide enough story material to keep the studio going for a decade.

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Music

AT THE Beverly theatre recently there was a Charley Chase two-reeler in which Charley sings with a male sextette backing him up. There also was some ensemble instrumental music. I enjoyed every foot of it. I found that I was somewhat hungry for some music with my screen entertainment.

With the advent of the sound device the screen was given an opportunity to gain tremendously by the judicious inclusion of music in its product. The proper understanding of its opportunities being beyond its mental capabilities, the industry proceeded to handle music in a manner that brought down upon it the derision of the public. Then in a manner consistent with its usual thought process, the industry decided that the public did not like music, quite the funniest conclusion it ever had reached.

In groping about for some cure for the present sickness of the box-office, it would be wise of the producers to try music again. First, however, they should get someone to tell them just where music belongs in screen entertainment. It has a definite place, just what the place is being quite plain to anyone familiar with the rudiments of screen art.

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Not Bad

THAT BAD pictures are responsible for the present unsatisfactory condition of motion picture finances seems to be the general understanding. Hollywood has an infallible method of determining the degree of merit possessed by a picture. If it does well at the box-office, it is a good picture; if it does badly, it is a poor one. As nearly all pictures are proving to be box-office disappointments, nearly all pictures are bad.

As a matter of fact, Hollywood is not turning out poor pictures, if by pictures we mean stories told on the screen, good acting, capable direction, elaborate production and satisfactory examples of screen writing. Never before in its history has Hollywood turned out better stories, more gripping dramas, than it is providing for the public to-day. Never before has Hollywood expressed itself upon the screen with a greater degree of technical perfection.

And still the box-office languishes. Why?

▼▼ BECAUSE Hollywood is expressing itself in a language foreign to its medium. Its medium is the camera and it is

expressing itself with the spoken word. It has deluded itself into the belief that it should speak its stories, and when it first began to talk, the public shared the delusion. But the public, invariably more intelligent than those who cater to it, was the first to realize that it was a delusion. When the realization comes to the film industry and it begins to make motion pictures that compare in quality with the talkies it now is making, prosperity will return to Hollywood.

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Crime

PERHAPS pictures depicting crime do not provoke people to commit crime. Perhaps they do. We won't go into that. But there is one angle of the argument that interests me.

Opponents of gangster pictures base their opposition on the view that scenes showing gangsters at work provoke young men to imitate in real life what they see on the screen. In rebuttal the film business points out that every crime picture ends with positive proof that crime does not pay, which being the case, the picture serves a useful moral purpose.

Let us assume that an impressionistic youth follows the course of a gangster picture. For five-sixths of the footage of all of them the gangster is shown as a romantic, glamorous figure living in luxury and with unlimited money. In the final sixth the lesson is taught that crime doesn't pay. The gangster is caught. The lesson the youth learns is what he must do to keep from being caught. Instead of being taught to be lawful, he is taught to be careful.

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Daddy Long Legs

WHO WAS it who said of some play that it produced enough dimples to catch the tears it provoked? I thought of it while viewing *Daddy Long Legs*, the Fox picture starring Janet Gaynor and directed by Alfred Santell. It is strong in that sentiment which we characterize as human, but so adroitly did Sonya Levien write the screen version of the old play and so matter-of-fact did Santell make his direction, that the picture does not venture so far into sentiment as to consist of nothing else. It is an admirable vehicle for the adorable Janet who once again demonstrates her vast capacity for keeping lumps in our throats.

Before viewing the picture I had read the local reviews of it and was quite prepared to hear Janet reading her lines in a thin and colorless voice. That was the impression the reviews gave me. But I found her voice to be completely satisfactory, full and rich and of that soft and appealing quality that one would associate with such a personality. Janet's performance is a delight. Not only does she possess an extraordinary spiritual quality that sets her apart from all other girls on the screen, but she is mastering rapidly all the technical requirements of the acting profession.

▼▼ WARNER BAXTER makes an ingratiating lead for Janet, giving a smooth and easy performance that adds much to the enjoyment of *Daddy Long Legs*. His ridiculous mustache, however, makes him hard to look at. Una Merkel makes my capitulation to her charms complete. She is an excellent comedienne and has done enough already to earn her a lasting place in pictures. John Arledge is a young man whom I haven't encountered before, but if the Fox company, which has him under contract, is wise, I will be given plenty of opportunity to grow acquainted with his screen appearances. He is a youth who has a lively sense of comedy values, and he displays as much ease before the camera as we could expect from a veteran. Sheila Mannors is another newcomer from whom we should hear, as she has obvious charm and promise of ability.

Claude Gillingwater, a really splendid artist, has a part that is not big enough to do credit to his ability, but I was pleased to see him again. I don't know the names of the individual children who attracted my attention in the opening sequence. All of them, however, gave fine performances.

▼▼ AT BEST, though, *Daddy Long Legs*, technically speaking, is a mechanical picture saved from being commonplace only by the presence and superb performance of Janet Gaynor. There is nothing distinguished in the direction, and the cutting is not even intelligent.

Daddy Long Legs is going to suffer at the box-office from the very bad parts that have been given Janet Gaynor since we've had talkies. Her followers struggled with her through these atrocities, but each one showed a falling off in patronage and it will take more than one good picture like this one to bring her back. What little she gains from *Daddy Long Legs* and perhaps from *Merely Mary Ann*, will be lost when she appears in the musical offering which Fox now is preparing for her and Charlie Farrell. Both of them are going to sing. The Fox organization seems to have gone insane. In Janet Gaynor it has perhaps the greatest potential money-maker in pictures, but if its sole aim were to destroy her box-office value, it could not proceed along more effective lines.

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Ladies' Man

THAT THERE is no hope for a box-office revival if Hollywood continues to put its faith in all-talkies is demonstrated conclusively by the reception given *Ladies' Man* by both the public and the critics. I missed seeing it at the studio, and after it was released I read so many unfavorable comments on it that I concluded it was not worth seeing, and as I can not divorce my inclination from my duties as a reviewer, I made no effort to catch it at a picture house. Against my inclinations, however, I was dragged out one night to a house that was showing it. When the curtains were drawn across the final fade-out I turned to Mrs. Spectator and remarked, "That is one of the finest all-talkies I have seen." And she, always a wise and discriminating judge, agreed with me.

Ladies' Man has everything—some beautiful direction by Lothar Mendes, really splendid performances by William Powell, Kay Francis, Olive Tell, Carole Lombard and Gilbert Emery; a sumptuous and pictorially effective production, and a capably written script for which Herman Mankiewicz deserves credit. It is a gripping drama of human emotions,

one that can not fail to hold the close interest of any audience. The fine performance of Bill Powell is enough in itself to make the picture worth while.

▼▼ I WANT TO make it clear that I enjoyed *Ladies' Man* thoroughly. My constant criticism of talkies as such is not based on my own preferences in screen entertainment. I am quite content to view a talkie any time if I can derive as much enjoyment from it as this Paramount production afforded me. One feature of it interested me greatly. It was the clever manner in which dialogue was eliminated and time lapses provided for by adroit cutting. "I know where we can go and be alone," Olive Tell says to Powell. There is a fade to the two in a cafe' and we hear Miss Tell say, "That is why I am unhappy." The whole story of her unhappiness thus becomes a part of the story, but we are spared the labor of listening to its recital. It is the fact of her unhappiness, not the cause of it, that has story value.

Ladies' Man demonstrates that Paramount is becoming more proficient at making talkies. Yet the critics yawned at it, abused the story and said that Powell was wasted in it. The public's reception of it is proving lukewarm. All this would indicate that Paramount's hope of a prosperous future lies in its ability to make better talkies than this one. It lacks that ability because *Ladies' Man* is just about as good as one can be.

It was not at this picture that the critics yawned. It was at talkies in general. The critics and the public alike are fed up. What I wrote late in 1928 has come to pass. I stated then, when talkies were shattering box-office records, that the public would not continue to patronize pictures in which the stories were told in dialogue. The industry laughed at me. It would be cruel of me to laugh at it now. It is suffering enough.

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Kick In

BARTLETT CORMACK did a mighty fine job of screen writing when he put this Willard Mack play into shape for filming. When producers become sane, a brilliant writer like Cormack is going to team up with some capable director, the team will work without supervision, and will turn out the kind of pictures the public wants. Cormack's strength as a screen writer lies in his ability to shape scenes in a manner that permits the camera to tell the greater part of the story. A return to satisfactory box-office conditions depends upon the extent to which this method of telling stories is developed. In writing *Kick In* Cormack did almost too good a job. He stuck unrelentingly to his story, as a capable writer always will, with the result that it is rather drab and depressing.

▼▼ THE INTELLIGENT direction of Richard Wallace, a really superb performance by Regis Toomey, and the pleasing presence of Clara Bow are what give *Kick In* its chief entertainment value. All the members of the rather extensive cast do well. Donald Crisp is particularly effective in the role of an inspector of detectives, and Wynne Gibson handles a dramatic part with vigor and intelligence. She is a capable young woman. Leslie Fenton, always a sincere performer, gives a graphic portrayal of a dope fiend.

The part played by Clara Bow is scarcely colorful enough to give the vibrant miss a chance to display all her talents, but it was a welcome change from the "It" roles that have been handed her.

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Mad Parade

A GOOD IDEA and good direction almost make *The Mad Parade* a good picture. It is the all-female photoplay presented by Herman M. Gumbin, directed by William Beaudine and featuring Evelyn Brent, Irene Rich, Louise Fazenda, Lilyan Tashman, Marceline Day, Fritzi Ridgeway, June Clyde, Elizabeth Keating, and Helen Keating. Bill Beaudine directed it admirably, but it was a staggering job to spin the tenuous story out to feature length and keep it interesting. The story deals with the heroic work done by girls in the World War, surely a subject of potential epic proportions. In its externals it has an epic quality. There are many inspiring and thrilling scenes. An air raid on a French village, the dramatic shelling of trucks driven by girls, the killing of Fritzi Ridgeway, the flight of Louise Fazenda from a dugout and her pursuit by Lilyan Tashman, and Evelyn Brent's dash across no-man's land—these thrills are presented on a scale and directed with an ability that make them worthy of a place in the best war picture ever made.

▼▼ THE STORY itself is an intimate one of the love affairs of the girls we see and the men who don't appear, but is much too trivial for the magnitude and significance of the atmosphere and background. We get the impression that the war stops every little while to give the girls an opportunity to attend to their personal affairs and to indulge in quarrels with Miss Ridgeway. There is story value in the unpopularity of Fritzi, but it is carried so far beyond its point of sufficient value that it becomes exceedingly tiresome.

We must give credit to Gumbin, however, for making an earnest effort to do something on a large scale. He is a young independent producer who spends his own money in carrying out his own ideas. There is enough merit in *Mad Parade* to entitle it to succeed at the box-office. I quarrel with it not so much because it is a poor picture, but because it is not a better one.

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Millionaire

THIS George Arliss comedy teaches us at least two things —that the public wants good acting and clean pictures. All that it has to its credit are the admirable performance of the star and the fact that it is clean and decent. For these two reasons it is doing well at the box-office. In spots the story becomes childish and it throughout has been given purely conventional direction. Its most sombre moments are when it tries hardest to be funny. Arliss always is delightful and when he is on the screen the audience is generous with its chuckles; but when an attempt is made to provoke laughs by showing a love-sick service station attendant absent-mindedly

sprinkling water on an innocent bystander, the picture becomes sad. There are several instances of this brand of scintillating comedy. And in an Arliss picture!

The closing sequence could have been notable for an amusing and whimsical quality, but apparently the producers ran out of brains just before it was reached.

▼▼ It is too bad that picture producers think there is only one George Arliss in the world—only one veteran actor worthy of being starred in character parts. There are a score or more skilled artists in Hollywood who could make old-men parts delightful enough to please any audience. Nothing has more box-office value than a lovable old man or woman shaping the destinies of young people. *The Millionaire* proves it, but the producers seem to think that all it proves is that the public wants George Arliss.

I saw this picture in Santa Maria, and at the moment of writing about it—somewhere near midnight—I have no way of refreshing my memory by consulting a list of those who figured in its making. I can't remember even who directed it. But you'll find all the information farther along in this *Spectator*. Consult "Reviewed in This Number."

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Dude Ranch

Here is as good a place as any other to explain why the pictures I review in this *Spectator* consist largely of those that have been released for some time. I have not been viewing pictures regularly for the past month, those I review in this issue being some I saw weeks ago, but which I did not feel equal to writing about. *Dude Ranch* is one of them. This Paramount comedy, directed by Frank Tuttle and starring Jack Oakie, I found most diverting. More than any other director I know, Tuttle has the knack of taking material that means little in itself and makes a great deal out of it.

Dude Ranch is designed only to amuse, and it achieves its purpose. At times it is hilarious and it never ceases to be funny, throughout revealing Tuttle in his happiest mood. He succeeds in getting competent performances from all the members of his cast. The production has the advantage of possessing a pictorially effective background against which the comedy moves forward at a brisk pace.

To prove that it is a western, *Dude Ranch* has a chase at the end that is liable to raise one's hair. It features a train, a bus and an automobile and is the last word in cinematic thrills.

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Finger Points

The manager of the out-of-town house in which I viewed this Barthelmess picture explained the situation to me. "You see," he said, "when pictures were silent a Barthelmess film was an event. Whenever I could get one, the wife knew there was a new dress coming to her for business always was good. But now that we have talkies—well, you see—less than two hundred seats occupied in an eight hundred-seat house. The talkies seem to make them all alike. I have so many people who turn out anyway, no matter what I show, and just as many of them turn out to see Alice White as there are to see Barthelmess. Is the picture any good? I haven't looked at it myself."

I told him that any picture that had Dick in it was a good picture to me, but I had to agree with him that the talkies made a difference. As I watched *The Finger Points* I sighed for the old Dick, the old ingratiating boy with the tender smile, the expressive eyes and the complete mastery of the art of silent acting. In this picture he is just an actor telling us in words what he used to tell us a thousand times more intriguingly in looks and action. *Finger Points* is not one of the talkies that I enjoyed.

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Subway Express

Harry Cohn undertook a tough job when he set out to make *Subway Express*, a story that is told entirely in the interior of a subway car. It has no scenic value, but it has a charmingly ingenious murder and a terrific lot of talking. To relieve its gruesomeness a comedy detective is included in the cast and he has to his credit another murder, that of the picture itself. It is one of the greatest comedy-relief crimes ever committed. Every time the audience finds itself becoming interested in the murder mystery the whole illusion is dissipated by the stupid and unfunny dialogue of the dumb detective. One would think that Harry Cohn would have too much sense to spoil a picture as he has spoiled this one.

Subway Express was directed by Fred Newmeyer, who did remarkably well considering the narrow limits within which he had to work. Jack Holt is the star, playing the detective who unravels the mystery. He gives a thoroughly satisfactory performance. Others in the cast, all of whom do well, are Aileen Pringle, Fred Kelsey, Jason Robards, Alan Roscoe, William Humphrey, Ethel Wales, Bertha Blackman, Max Asher, Earl Seide and Lillianne Leighton.

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▼▼ To P. S. Harrison (*Harrison's Reports*) goes the credit for the short life of advertising films. As soon as they began to appear on the screen, Pete donned his war paint, picked up his tomahawk and took the trail. He waged an exceedingly efficient and energetic fight in which he enlisted the co-operation of newspapers scattered all over the country. In face of all the rumpus he kicked up, the producers who had started to make sponsored short-subjects, one by one announced that they had changed their minds. It is just as well, although at no time did I feel that the matter was important enough to excite anyone greatly. However, it provided my good friend Pete with another opportunity to show what a capable fighter he is, and for the satisfaction that gave me I have to thank the advertising films, consequently to me, at least, their short life was not in vain.

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▼▼ From where I'll sit as I write my portion of the *Spectator* this summer, I could reverse the action of my fountain pen and squirt the Pacific Ocean. We have taken a

beach house in what I think is termed an oil field. Anyway, there are plenty of panting derricks in the immediate vicinity of our abode, but they don't bother us any more than they would if they were on the other side of the sea. There are none between us and the surf, and that is all that counts. My writing place is the front porch which the most venturesome surf exuberances just manage to reach before they expire. Pelican, sea gulls, and some long-legged birds that perpetually seem to be in a terrific hurry to get nowhere, are distractions that I must get used to. An occasional seal is an event good for at least an hour's loaf. Our milkman informs me that we have as neighbors Janet Gaynor, Mae Murray, Frances Marion and George Hill, but I haven't prowled around yet. I go in swimming every morning and I have a lot of tar on my feet. My smoking tobacco is too damp.

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▼▼ THE WILD scramble now for novels and plays is due solely to the inability of production heads to think in terms of their business. It merely is another evidence of their monumental stupidity. Owing to conditions which they should understand, but which are beyond their ability to grasp, producers find the industry drifting rapidly towards the panic stage and the first thing at hand to blame it on is the difficulty in securing stories. Instead of looking for motion pictures, they look for plays and novels; instead of making motion pictures, they are putting the plays and novels on the screen. And so dense is their ignorance, so vast their incompetence, that they do not know why the financial condition of the industry is more alarming than it ever was before. And so great is their egotism that there is no use telling them.

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▼▼ PRODUCING organizations can not stop the double-feature-program practice by inserting a clause in their releasing contracts providing that their pictures are to be shown singly. As is the case with everything pertaining to the film business, the public will be the determining factor. In Montreal, for instance, where the double-feature practice originated, sixty-four houses regularly show two feature pictures on every program. Their patrons expect them and will be content with nothing less. In spite of anything the producers can do, the practice will continue to spread, even though it is hard to understand how any audience can endure two pictures of the sort that is being turned out now. One at a time is quite enough for me.

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▼▼ WHAT DOES the public want? Producers, lacking an understanding of their business that would provide the answer, ask one another this question and succeed only in continuing to give the public what it doesn't want. I'll tell them one thing that the public would like: A human drama in which Claude Gillingwater had the leading part as the grandfather of young people whose romance became his concern. Gillingwater is a superb artist whom the fool industry is neglecting to its own loss. He could make an old-man role a cinematic gem that would make box-offices happy.

▼▼ METRO was annoyed with me for saying that it is driving Norma Shearer into oblivion by presenting her in a series of pictures that were based on various phases of prostitution. It even did not give me credit for being generous when I advised it to put her in pictures that were more consistent with the charm of her personality. But the advice was taken. She is going to do *Smilin' Through* as a talkie. It will not score the success it did as a silent, but it is clean and decent, and that is something.

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▼▼ THUS FAR I have been fortunate in having missed the showing of any of the series of "comedies" in which chickens, ducks and geese play all the parts. I have seen one of Metro's dog pictures which is quite enough of that sort of thing to do me for a long time. I can not understand how anyone can get any amusement out of watching dumb creatures being forced to do things that it is not natural for them to do.

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▼▼ RAINE BENNETT, who contributes to this *Spectator* some spirited thoughts on fantasy as applied to motion pictures. is "the poet of the air" who offers a rare treat on KFI every Saturday evening. If you like beautiful thoughts expressed in beautiful English, light your pipe at seven-forty-five, turn the dial to KFI and listen. I hope to tease Bennett into making many more contributions to these pages.

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▼▼ WHEN MAYOR PORTER returns to Los Angeles there should be a tremendous mob at the depot to welcome him home by asking him why he made such a sublime ass of himself in France. It is somewhat humiliating to be a resident of a city that could so far forget itself as to make such a damned fool its mayor.

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▼▼ THE DAY after Darryl Zanuck was given supreme command of Warner productions, Warner stock reached the lowest point in its career. And all the time I've been laboring under the impression that Wall Street had no idea of what was going on in Hollywood.

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▼▼ A LOCAL magazine, *Game and Gossip*, an interesting and beautifully printed publication, has an article glorifying somewhat Peter the Hermit. It has been hard for me to enthuse over Peter since the day two or three years ago that I was tramping past his camp and saw him cruelly beating one of his dogs.

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▼▼ METRO boasts that twelve different writers, all notable craftsmen, worked on one of its stories while it was being prepared for production. In any other profession or industry such a statement would not be a boast. It would be a confession.

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▼▼ JUDGING BY conditions as we find them in Hollywood, producers are showing more real brains in keeping people off their lots than they are in getting money into the box-office.

An Alien In Hollywood

By R. E. Sherwood

THE Editor of the *Hollywood Spectator* will probably be pretty indignant to hear that there is one more playwright in Hollywood—just as the mayor of Newcastle-on-Tyne would be peeved by the discovery of another lump of imported coal.

However—in this case—Mr. Beaton has only himself to thank, or blame. In the columns of his obnoxious journal, he has frequently kidded me because I am so consistently misinformed in my motion picture reviews. The *Hollywood Spectator* has pointed out on more occasions than one that I'm shamefully ignorant of the subject whereof I write with so much authority. I have been told, in these pages, that I should do one of two things: come out to Hollywood and get an education, or shut up.

The latter alternative is, of course, unthinkable for one of my temperament.

So I'm here, in Hollywood—and more bewildered than ever.

I wanted to see all the studios and gather some inside information. But they are now applying a lot of new rules designed to keep out the riff-raff from Iowa and points east. It is impossible for a stranger to get in, especially if he is not the type, unless he has a letter of recommendation from his clergyman and an engraved card from Louella Parsons.

▼▼ HAVING NEITHER of these, I was rebuffed at one portal after another. I went to the Brown Derby, but all I saw there was a group of gentlemen whom I have seen before in the Hotel Astor on West 45th Street.

Consequently, there was nothing for it but to apply for work. I went to Howard Hughes, who is notoriously liberal. As luck would have it, he hadn't read what I said about *Hell's Angels*, so he hired me.

This bit of good fortune enabled me to gain admission to the United Artists Studio—but since I have been there, the only people I have seen are fellow members of The Dramatists' Guild (all in bad standing).

It's amazing how many authors of unsuccessful stage plays are now wearing white flannels in Hollywood.

▼▼ ONE PLAYWRIGHT that I encountered reported to me as follows:

"When I get back to New York (God forbid!) the first thing I'll do is murder George Kaufman and Moss Hart, the authors of *Once In a Lifetime*. Before the production of that play, everything was fine for us playwrights out here. Our employers didn't bother us, and we didn't annoy them. All that passed between us was the weekly courtesy of a check, and aside from the labor of endorsing and depositing it, our time was our own.

"I was just beginning to love California, and was making some very valuable friendships here—when along came *Once In a Lifetime* to convince the Glogauers that us authors are simply itching to work. What an idea!"

Playwrights

▼▼ THE PLAYWRIGHTS in Hollywood are deserving of intense sympathy. The psychological problem confronting them is a grievous one: it is the ancient, relentless problem of self-justification. "How shall I persuade myself that I am worthy of all this?" is the question they utter in the secrecy of their inner beings, and the inevitable reply is, "I haven't the faintest idea."

They have just been through the impact of a flop on Broadway—or a series of flops. They have smarted under the scorn of the critical boys who lead in *Variety's* Box Score. Their pride is frayed. And then—they are approached by the emissaries of Mr. Goldwyn or Mr. Mayer, and cajoled and flattered into thinking that they're indispensable to a colossal, potent industry. They are given swimming pools, tennis courts, patios, rose arbors and views of Catalina Island. They have become somebody at last, and they feel that they should now be able to sneer at the small-time Broadway theatre people who had rejected them. And yet—there remains the persistent, cankerous suspicion that Broadway was right in its estimate of their worth, and that Hollywood is grotesquely wrong.

▼▼ AT THE TOP of the contract that I signed with Caddo Productions, Inc., was typewritten my name, and under it the statement, "herein called The Artist."

That was alarming enough—to be known henceforth as "The Artist"—but what followed was even more staggering.

"Whereas," read the contract, "The Artist represents that the services to be rendered hereunder are and shall continue to be of a *special, unique, unusual, extraordinary* and *intelleetual character*."

Who said that I represented all that?

Fortunately my contract extended for only two weeks, but I have heard of other authors who have signed up for long terms. Think of anyone continuing to be "special, unique, unusual, extraordinary and intellectual" for twelve whole months!

Howard Hughes

▼▼ TO REVERT for a moment to my late employer, Howard Hughes: In view of the fact that he treated me with a degree of consideration that I never hoped to gain from any motion picture producer, it ill becomes me to speak favorably of him. It is always wise for a critic to pan his friends and associates so that he may gain credit for great impartiality and lack of prejudice.

Nevertheless, I note that Mr. Beaton has expressed confidence in Hughes as a superior celluloid merchant, and, I therefore feel justified in doing likewise. He is unquestionably a unique figure in the movie business, and an intensely interesting one.

▼▼ HE HAS HIS severe limitations—principally immaturity (which is also a considerable asset) and ignorance of almost everything outside the realms of mechanism and sport. He resembles a small boy who is realizing his ambition to drive a hook-and-ladder truck at seventy miles an hour through the most congested districts, making a lot of noise and revelling in hairbreadth escapes. One may reasonably ask, "Will that crazy kid never grow up?"; but at the same time, one may be sure that he will manipulate the truck with an admirable skill and cool-headedness, and even though at the end

of his ride he will forget what he came for, and neglect to put out the fire, he will have given the bystanders a great show while he was on the way.

It is neither the desire to make money nor the gratification of an exhibition complex that is responsible for his activity in the film business. It is nothing more nor less than a creative enthusiasm that can be sated in no other way. He would probably sock anyone who called him an artist; I imagine that he thinks that an artist is necessarily something of a siss. But that is what, in his curious way, he is.

▼▼ He is possessed of an extraordinary shrewd native intelligence, and a sense of realism which enables him to see his own blunders clearly. *Hell's Angels* was an expensive mess, but it has turned out to be a profitable one, for it has contributed immeasurably to the education of Howard Hughes. (Those who know baseball history will recall that Fred Merkle's disastrous boner converted him into one of the most valuable players in the game.)

The greatest testimony to Hughes's instinctive good taste is to be found in the roster of directors now working for him: Frank Lloyd, Howard Hawks and Lewis Milestone. The presence of such men on the pay-roll is not to be attributed entirely to vast wealth nor to his dumb luck, either. His principal object in life is to make good pictures, and he knows that the first, and last, step toward that object is to enlist the services of good directors.

▼▼ He has also a flaming spirit of independence. I doubt very much that all the Schencks, Goldwyns and Mayers of this earth will ever put a dent in his resolve to keep himself apart from their system. They will not flatter or cajole or gyp him into the form of bondage that they seek to impose.

I hope he holds out, and continues as he is now—with a small organization, dedicated to the production of few pictures, all of which are hand-made. In this way he can be of vast service to the movies and can also have the good time which is his heart's desire.

Hooch and Hamburger

▼▼ While crossing the Mexican border, after a happy ride on the wheel at Agua Caliente, I stopped for a brief chat with the U. S. Customs authorities. The only contraband that they found was one apple, the property of my seven-year-old daughter, who had planned to munch on it during the long ride to Beverly Hills. The minions of the law took the apple away from the child, leaving her parents to explain to her just why it was right and proper of them to do so.

At almost the same time, radio fans were listening to a thrilling broadcast from a schooner on Rum Row, during which the skipper told the world that he had been serving the bootleg industry successfully for ten years and had, on one occasion, landed 68,000 cases of illicit hooch on the shores of these United States.

▼▼ It is all very well to sound a note of cheery hope in times of stress, but it's my belief that a roadeteria proprietor near Long Beach overdid it somewhat when he hung out a sign bearing the legend: *Optimistic Hamburgers.*

There is no earthly reason why hamburgers should be warmed with the glow of optimism. That is a quality which should be limited to those customers who have to eat them.

Blondes

▼▼ One has to be horribly careful of what one says here in Hollywood. It is necessary to look before you peep.

I recently composed a sermon on the intensely interesting (to me) subject of feminine beauty in these parts, and my remarks were published in the *Hollywood Daily Citizen.* I protested vehemently against the prevalence of platinum blonde hair—which, it seemed to me, is a gross perversion of nature in a land where nature is said to have done her best. I assigned the initial responsibility for this wholesale atrocity to Miss Jean Harlow.

Now it appears that I was guilty of bad taste, for Miss Harlow and I were at the time employees of the same concern. Both she and I were discoveries of Howard Hughes, and a feeling of esprit de corps, if not the ordinary standards of gentlemanly conduct, should have prevented me from saying a word against her.

Consequently, I take this opportunity to retract everything . . . But I still feel badly about platinum blonde hair. Indeed, my emotions are so intense that I'm inspired to the following lyrical outburst:

Complexions are helped by Arden or Pond—
But only God can make a blonde.

Lamentations

▼▼ There are so many things that upset and baffle me that I can't begin to list them all. (A voice: Did anyone urge you to begin?)

What is most disturbing is all this talk about retrenchment. What is retrenchment? Does it mean they're going back to war pictures?

During the past few months, whenever any Californian arrived reluctantly on the east coast, he would shout: "What's this business depression that you New Yorkers are beefing about? Where is it? We haven't heard of it out in God's country. Out there everything's fine. The trouble with you easterners is—you're yellow. You're squawking before you're hurt. . . . Come on, brother. Brace up! Buck up! Buy now! Forget old man Depression, and old man Depression will forget about you! Business is good! Keep it good! Don't sell America short!" Or words to that effect.

▼▼ Consequently, when I came out here, I expected to gain surcease from the chorus of moanings and groanings that make night hideous in my own home town. Instead of which . . .

It is hardly necessary for me to put down the manifold lamentations that have assailed my ears in this favored realm. Suffice it to say that I heard one eminent producer justify his dismissal of a large number of employees on the ground that "thousands of men and women are standing in bread lines in New York City."

He evidently felt that Hollywood is being behind the

Kidders

▼▼ Those who make a profession of kidding (they used to be known as "satirists") are inclined to be sour, despondent fellows with funereal faces and torpid livers. Their moroseness is attributable to the profound conviction that theirs is the most futile occupation in the world. They waste their lives away hurling the grenades of ridicule at the manifold accumulations of hypocrisy and bunk only to see their well-aimed missiles fizzle out ineffectually. The satire perishes, but the bunk apparently goes on forever.

Nevertheless—while I have been in Hollywood, I have come to the conclusion that the kidders have been underestimating their own powers. It seems that they have accomplished much more than they know.

▼▼ I have already mentioned the marked influence of *Once In a Lifetime,* which has caused so many protesting authors either to be sent home or put to work. Even more apparent is the effect of years and years of jibing upon the self-consciousness of the California booster. That obstreperous patriot has become much less of a pest than he used to be. He is still far from perfect, but at least he can now be

brought to admit that one has a right to live beyond the city limits of Los Angeles if one wants to; and that is an enormous gain.

It is unquestionably kidding that has brought about this deflation of collective ego—with the assistance, perhaps, of the Notre Dame football team.

Advertise!!

▼▼ I'M PRESUMABLY a motion picture critic—but here I've been talking for hours and as yet have not criticised one motion picture.

The terrible truth of the matter is that in the past few weeks I haven't set foot inside a film theatre nor even a projection room. That negligence is shameful but explicable: I came out here to see Hollywood, not Hollywood's product, which I can study to much better advantage, and in its true perspective, in New York.

So I shall close this rambling discourse with the injunction to one and all to ADVERTISE HEAVILY IN THE HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR! Because, if you do, the contributors to this journal may get paid for their stuff.

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Spirit of Fantasy In Motion Pictures

By RAINE BENNETT

THERE has been a weary run on realism in motion pictures; while the cinema, perhaps, has never been a proper medium for realistic expression.

Surely, a picture is a shadow. Why, then, should shadows be convincing? Is it not enough to expect from them not conviction but entertainment?

If we may assume the affirmative, entertainment on the screen does not have to be real, nor convincing. Being shadows, however, a picture must behave like shadows; and shadows, when behaving naturally, are fantastic.

To say that we ourselves are shadows, is not a figure of speech. We do not know what we are. But we hope we are not real, because all that is real dies—and only the unreal lives.

In the Middle Ages many unreal creatures were alive in the public mind. Fairies were very real to the Irish; Brownies to the Scotch, and Elves to the English. In the Scandinavias they had Gnomes and Pixies; and in Germany there were Dwarfs. In Italy there were Demons; in Arabia, Efreets. Satan was King of the shadow-world; and God was Light.

Such thoughts filled the minds of adults and children; thrilled their hearts, inflamed their imaginations.

It was great entertainment.

▼▼ TO-DAY, we have none of these in America. Each has fled our woodlands, and our hearthsides. We have no Banshees and we burn no Witches.

How much better off, in point of entertainment, were the gude folks of the Middle Ages!

How marvelously diverting were the gods and godesses of Greece!

What, then, are we to do for ourselves, to take the place of these, in this disillusioned modern day?

Why, awaken the denizens of those shadowy realms; arouse the imps of fantasy—through their natural modern medium: the shadow-art of motion-pictures!

Fantasy holds the mirror of distortion up to nature; giving back, in kaleidoscopic refraction, our secret selves.

Stand before a concave looking-glass—you will appear to be ridiculously fat.

Stand before a convex looking-glass—you will appear to be alarmingly thin.

▼▼ DOES NOT each of these fantastic reflections of ourselves offer better entertainment than a plain mirror, which confronts the eye, affronts the heart, and informs the mind of the existence of a deplorable fact?

By all means, give us fantasy on the screen—which has, to-day, become muscle-bound through inordinate commercialism. Keep Alice in Wonderland, and Tom among his Water Babies.

Make the world safe for James Stephens, Carl Sandburg, Alfred Kremborg, Christopher Morley and Gillette Burgess.

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Films—Anno Domini 1931

(Variety)

One of the major companies recently forced the retirement of one of its executives in New York by locking him out of his office. That the company had contemplated ousting the particular official had been known for some time, but the procedure was something different.

It was first accomplished by firing the executive's personal office assistants and was followed by shutting the office. The next day all records were removed to another vault.

▼ ▼ ▼

Writer-directors

(Variety)

Writers who can direct and directors who can write are being favored by producers now as one of the means of economy, currently the chief topic around all studios.

Old type director who bragged that he never looked at his script is a thing of the past. Producers now favor a personnel who can both create and get their stuff onto celluloid.

Names, and Some Vanities

By Frank Daugherty

While the talk is still hot about the futility of building names in the industry, reverting to some sort of half-Russian theory of the artistic advantage of types, it might be well for the American industry, at least, to consider the case of its two or three greatest names and their meaning for the future of film history.

Chaplin's great picture, *City Lights*, has deservedly earned him the plaudits of the critics all over the world. His triumphant tour has proclaimed him one of the truly popular men of the century. Yet a recent note in the *Motion Picture Daily* announces several Baltimore exhibitors as "squawking" about the business the great man's picture is doing. They even have the temerity to say that he should make talkers instead of silent pictures, and, heresy of heresies—return to the two-reeler for length!

Mary Pickford, wisest of all wise little showmen, stops over in Southampton to explain to a correspondent of the *London Evening News* that she and Doug are as devotedly fond of one another as ever, then steps into a telephone booth to call Doug, and leaves the door ajar long enough for the reporter to hear the greeting she gives him: "Hullo, darling, how are you?"

Then she gives the reporter that earful about burning up all her pictures because they will be old-fashioned when stereoscopic-colored films have their day, with voices that will be natural "instead of the terrible noise we have at the present time."

▼▼ And you want to know what all this portends? Well, if two of the greatest "names" we have developed have to resort to personal tours and an airing of their matrimonial problems to sell their pictures, and the third has to turn down bids to the king's private tatting parties in order to discourse learnedly on the difference between the king and the clown, the time has come, as that good old walrus of Carroll's said, to talk about it a little. It is an open secret that Mary Pickford's pictures have not made the millions once they did. Her consort, between traveling and shying a golf ball across the English downs, has found time recently but for one nondescript effort about which no one talks with any degree of pride—except perhaps Edmund Goulding. The names of this pair have rattled around the world so innumerably many times, have been on the tongues of kings and cabbagemen, nurses and counselors, babes and graybeards so often, that it is possible to conclude that there is probably not a square foot of ground between the poles where they are not known.

Yet a bad picture by either one of them will hardly make wages for the prop men.

▼▼ The case of Chaplin is a little different. This fellow, there seems no doubt about it, is an artist. Not only so, but he is a great artist. Yet the exquisite fineness of Mr. Chaplin's conceptions seemed to matter not at all the other day when Mr. Katz or someone of equal prominence refused to take his picture for his circuit of several hundred theatres right here in Mr. Chaplin's own adopted land. And then there were those Baltimore exhibitors. The art of Chaplin meant not a thing to them.

I have sometimes wondered if the motion picture is possible of development as a great art. Great artists arise in the world of books and painting, etc., and their works, perhaps netting them only a few farthings during their lifetime, roll up their principal return in the centuries which follow, during which the thick-witted generations have an opportunity to catch up with the artist's meanings. But Miss Pickford claims, not without reason, that her pictures will be outmoded in a very few years. And if hers will, may not Chaplin's also? What if he is the greatest silent pantomimist we ever have known? May we not have a motion picture of the future so sensational in effect and so broad in scope that it will seem a futile and a silly thing to do to haul out those old Chaplin pictures, like ancient papyrus, to have one long last scholarly look at them?

▼▼ There are, of course, those of us who do not believe that it will ever be quite that bad. But at least the situation seems to bring one point clearly to the fore. Perhaps two. One, that the more we overload any art with mechanical appurtenances, the less likely is it to withstand the burden of time, which has a rather vigorous way of rusting away what is material and mechanical—leaving the art based on them with not much more than skin and bones to stand in. Two, that if the motion picture's true development is to be a development of mechanics, it may be, and is, doomed to a very temporal and almost ephemeral history; but doomed or not, it equally may become a very high expression of mechanics. The question then arises as to whom the motion picture best expresses, and the answer of course is the mechanic. Since, then, the director is the true mechanic of the motion picture, even this elongated argument seems to bring us again to the conclusion that the only artist, the only worker in pictures who has even a remote chance of becoming an artist, is the director. What then, becomes of those nice fellows in the latest Eddie Schmidt clothes who wander about studios under the guise of being directors and sneer at the "mechanical nonsense" of the Russians?

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Is It Theatre?

Mr. George Jean Nathan's latest theatrical propaedeutics in the current issue of *Vanity Fair*, while glistening with the usual Nathan lustre of word and phrase, descend, in at least one poor reader's thought, to a level of frippery heretofore untouched by such a sage commentator. Mr. Nathan asks himself, after some general praise of the worthiness but dispraise of the general dullness of Theatre Guild productions, if they are really theatre. Precisely, "It is art, but is it theatre?"

Nor am I going to bore you with a long dissertation on a question that was animating the graybeards when I first was learning to whittle a stick out in the Washington

woods. I care not at all whether either the Theatre Guild, Mr. Cohan, Mr. Frohman, Mr. Selwyn, Eva Le Gallienne or any of the rest of them are either theatre or art. But I am interested when the foremost commentator on matters theatrical wastes a whole page on the question. I may not care for his conclusions, but I am allowed, I hope, to wonder a little why he should be bothered with drawing them at all.

▼▼ THIS SAME Mr. Nathan, on a tour of inspection of the beer-gardens of Europe last year, stopped long enough in Paris to see *Sous Les Toits de Paris*. Among the twenty others in the theatre when he saw it, he reported himself as extremely bored. The picture came over here and gave the ragamuffin movie critics something to talk about for weeks. In a world-wide vote of movie critics, the newspaper *Der Deutsche* of Berlin was pleased to record the picture the first choice of a majority. After which there was more talk.

Now, there are interesting conclusions to draw from this state of affairs—a stage critic whose works rank as literature—well, perhaps not necessarily rank—with nothing more red-blooded to talk about than whether his foremost art theatre is after all theatre, and a lot of movie scribblers who manage to animate words all over thousands of pages just because a little French picture in which they probably understood none of the dialogue struck their fancy.

▼▼ IT BRINGS to mind the days before writing slid down the rocks as a human activity into its present ocean of bad manners, morals and intellectual inappreciableness. The gusty fellows preceding this period had been writing much as an alarm clock unwinds, with no thought for the neighbors or niceties. Then came the George Moores, the Flauberts, the Arthur Symonses, the Henry Jameses, the Walter Paters, the John Addington Symondses and took the lid off writing in an effort to find out what it was all about. Writing became an art, but was hardly longer writing. And when you pick up a book or a magazine to-day in which appear the outpourings of your favorite authors, you are reading the results of that introspection.

So now comes the theatre. To it the motion picture always has been a dirty beggar asking for its earnings. It still is. But to our credit it may be said that only of late have we earned the opprobrium. Among the brightest beacon lights lighting us out of that theatre wallow, have been *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and *Sous Les Toits de Paris*—both received in the grand critical manner by Mr. Nathan as tripe.

Barge on then, you makers of tripe. Make more. And talk about it, live it, eat it and exhume it. Only don't stop to ask yourselves too seriously whether it really is tripe, because the minute you do you may doubt it. And doubt brings a cessation of effort. And the first thing you know you will be admitting to yourselves that it is art all right, but the question will cling—is it tripe? And then you might as well sell out to the theatre, for you will be right where Mr. Nathan places it now.

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Paramount On Parade

THE news, just arrived via one of the Hollywood daily trade papers, that Walter Wanger is out at Paramount and that Ben Schulberg is sitting again on the throne, will doubtless be old when this edition of the *Spectator* goes to press. Yet it opens enough interesting avenues of speculation to make it serve for some comment.

My quarrel is not with Wanger, nor yet with Schulberg. For my part, I believe both of them have shown sufficient ability to indicate that they know what pictures are about. But nothing is more certain than that as a pair of executives working in the same interests they resemble nothing so much as a team of horses, each horse pulling in an opposite direction. I hope there is no doubt in anyone's mind how materially this has slowed down Paramount production during the past year.

It so happens that I sat in a Paramount executive's office when this news was delivered on this particular morning. The news then was still unverified. It may never be. But Paramount and the motion picture industry in general may well hope that it will be.

▼▼ THE TIME was when Paramount stood undisputed leader of the industry. Then Thalberg pushed M-G-M over the top. Junior Laemmle and Darryl Zanuck also have figured as the producers of some of the best of the recent pictures. Paramount hasn't had a first rate picture since *The Love Parade*—I am speaking, of course, of the box-office. The Von Sternberg pictures and *Tabu* and *Rango* have been artistic successes, but have done their share, too, to beggar the company.

Those on the coast who have known him have always considered Ben Schulberg one of the first-rate minds of pictures. I have met him only once, but I have talked, from time to time, to hundreds of his employees. I have never heard him either disrespectfully or slightingly referred to unless by someone who had ten minutes before been fired by him. When they had been fired for an hour they generally returned to their high opinion of him.

I do not know Walter Wanger at all. I do know that he has been responsible for fine productions emanating from the East Coast studios. I have heard him referred to generally as a likable and competent executive. But when two executives are given almost equal power, and both have ability, something is bound to happen. Paramount under either of these men will go ahead again to its proper place in the front ranks of picture makers. It has probably a majority of the talent of the world in its various plants. But under both of them, it must continue to falter on its way, aiming in two directions at once. Some of us have been surprised that a picture general as old and crafty as Adolph Zukor has not seen this before.

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Eyebrows

VENGALI. Two or three times while this was running, I thought I caught a glimpse of the fun that was in *Trilby* as its author fashioned it. But they were very brief. Still, I cherish them, for it is becoming increasingly infrequent that I recognize old favorites in their movie masquerade. There was a time when I worried about this, and called it the fault of supervisors, and adaptors, and directors: it is only lately that I have understood how much at fault an actor may be.

The Barrymore penchant for doing things the Barrymore way has its advantages, but it has its drawbacks, too. If I am expected to sit up and watch *Svengali's* eyes turn Lon Chaneywise to water for minutes on end, I object. I object also to the way Barrymore has robbed the piece of its delicious humor. A sepulchral laugh or two is there, I admit, crowded in among Machiavellian deviltries; but the whole business is so dismally carried out that I could not but wonder what the studio officialdom was doing while Du Maurier was so unmercifully being hanged.

▼▼ I SAW Marian Marsh for the first time in a recent Barrymore release, *The Mad Genius*. For some reason, which must have been a stupid one, I mixed her in my mind with someone who smiles and wears few clothes for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. They may, for all I know, be sisters. She

is a blonde like the other, but her face, framed by those straw-colored curls, is vastly more interesting. That she is not a *Trilby* I account for not so much by the fact that she couldn't do it—for I think she could—but by the fact that she was in a Barrymore picture directed by Archie Mayo. The naivete of a *Trilby* would hardly emerge from between those two monuments to obviousness under any circumstances.

The cast of *Svengali* is generally well chosen in likeness to the Du Maurier drawings, the settings of Anton Grot give background which seems at all times authentic and interesting, and there are occasional technical effects by Fred Jackman which stimulated me. But I do not rate *Svengali* the sort of picture you will want to take visiting Elks to see.

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Second Hand

UP POPS THE DEVIL. When, along about the middle of next season, it is being anxiously asked among motion picture producers just what they have done that motion picture houses are empty while theatres are beginning to be crowded again, I entertain a vain hope that I will be called on to explain. I have seen it coming for a long time. It is inevitable that the time will arrive when the theatre will again make its competition to pictures felt.

The reasons I shall bring forward will be weighted with sage observation and perhaps invention, but they will be in the main true. Motion picture producers have been making stage plays for a couple of years, and in every case, with the possible exception of the pictures of George Arliss, they have been making them poorly. There seems to me to be a logical way for producers to determine this question for themselves, divorced even as most of them are from any knowledge of syllogism. Let them ask themselves whether they would rather see a real ocean or a postcard of one, whether they would rather dance with Marilyn Miller or see her photograph in *Variety*, whether they would rather enter Odd McIntyre's apartment and be bitten by his Sealyham, or look at that false-face of him in the *Examiner*. The answer should bring some sort of constructive reasoning into the dark panelled offices behind which so little of it seems to transpire.

You are going to suppose, of course, that I shall name *Up Pops the Devil* as a case in point. Well, why not? Your patient reviewer saw this play on the local boards with a cast which had in the main never been nearer New York than Chicago. It was a zestful, lively little comment on the difficulties writers have supporting their friends, sweethearts and bootleggers on a salary from an advertising office. It was chockfull of bright sayings by youngsters who still had down on their lips, and it followed no line of departure from some three or four hundred other comedies written since this century barged across the line. But it was real. It was flesh and blood. It was well acted, well staged, well presented; and when I went out from it I went out in such enthusiasm that, when I got a letter from the leading lady thanking me for my notice of her performance, I wrote back and asked her to break a pretzel with me sometime. You will know by that that I was impressed.

▼▼ NOW ALONG come Eddie Sutherland and the Messrs. Skeets Gallagher, Stuart Erwin, Norman Foster, Edward Nugent, and the Mesdames Carole Lombard, Lilyan Tashman and Joyce Compton and try to convince me that what they are showing me is just the same as I saw at the Belasco or the Mayan or wherever it was. But it won't do. They aren't as good. They haven't added a single advantage that the screen might have given them, and they labor under the serious disadvantage of presenting it to me with voices which croak out of a horn behind a screen fifty yards from where I am sitting. These voices, before ever they reach me, are caught up into a space big enough to house the dirigible Los Angeles, are perforated several thousand times by shafts of cold air, and are passed on to me at last so thin and weakened that I have difficulty knowing which is Carole Lombard and which is Lilyan Tashman—if you know what I mean.

Even the beautiful photography of Karl Struss, always one of the greatest pleasures I have in a motion picture theatre, failed to save this pale imitation of a roadshow for me.

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Vulgar

PARTY HUSBAND. Someone at First National has been confusing his mind with the problems of modern marriage. The movie colony, when they start worrying with problems, generally go all the way, and I can't see that the present picture suffers from any lack of effort to bare all the details. Dorothy Mackaill and James Rennie start out to hocus-pocus produce one of those marriages which shall be the marvel and envy of all other married couples whatever—you know, the sort of marriage in which they maintain their separate individualities, each goes his own way, plays with whom he wills, and yet maintains ever a sweetened and equable disposition toward the home, home duties, ties and obligations. Oh, well, as Joe Donahue told them: it would have been a good trick even if they had been able to do it.

The difficulty with the handling of these situations by the movie intellectuals is that they generally strain themselves all out of shape to make every move perfectly obvious to the audience long before the actors enact it. Audiences, though proverbially dumb—some of them even dumber than the movie people give them credit for, and that, you may know, is dumb—instinctively resent what they do not always formulate into thoughts. They resent even being thought dumb—as well they should. They resent having a picture imply that they haven't sufficient understanding to follow it as it goes along, but must be told several moments, sometimes fifteen or twenty minutes, in advance just what is going to happen next.

▼▼ BUT FOR all that they do this subconsciously—or should I say unconsciously?—they do not always hoist the flags which reveal this to the movie barons, who on occasion can be dumb themselves. Thus, if there were any of the Warner-First National bunch at the Warner Hollywood theatre when I saw this they very likely thought the audience was taking it very well. There was a generous string of

laughs through its running; there were moments when the whole body of twenty or thirty people there hung with suspense, or what looked like suspense, on the every word of the hero and heroine; and there were even moments when it might have looked as if they really were enjoying themselves. And what reason do I have, say you, to suppose that they weren't? Well, perhaps the few who were there didn't sufficiently impress me so; perhaps because there probably were fewer and fewer there as the week went on; but largely because I can't conceive of an audience of ordinary human beings so far forgetting that they are supposed to be able to think as to like it.

The direction, by Clarence Badger, follows conventional lines so closely that I should have been hard put to it, had there been no title, to tell it from the direction of at least fifteen other directors I can name. The adaptation and dialogue are by Charles Kenyon.

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Horsey

SWEEPSTAKES. When Eddie Quillan whoop-te-doos his horse across the finish line in the first reel of this picture, the audience laughs quite heartily. As far as my memory serves me, that is just about the last time it laughed at Eddie. The rest of the time it was only convulsed by the hardboiled humor of *Sleepy Jones*, as portrayed by the king of all *Sleepy Joneses*, James Gleason.

Lew Lipton's story, to begin with, was not of the best. It begins in the true Alger style with the poor jockey accused of something he didn't do, and all because of a girl, then has him wander, footsore and alone, from race track to race track, always being recognized, always losing his job when he is, always footpadding on to another track. The final landing at the track of our old Aunt Juana just over the border, is original only because it is one of the first of several hundred pictures which will use this locale now that the trek to Augua Caliente has become a week-end habit for Hollywoodites. The good old horse the jockey had ridden in his best days wins the sweepstakes, the girl and the whole shebang when Jockey Quillan finally is convinced that he ought to ride just this once again.

As a poor reporter who has been subjected to it several hundred times, I thought we might have been spared that final tag of the baby on the rocking horse learning from his now (again) famous father how to say whoop-te-doo in a horse's ear in a manner to make it run circles around all the other horses in pictures.

Momentary glimpses of Lew Cody, King Baggot and Paul Hurst were hardly gratifying to one who has seen these old troupers used to such good advantage in better pictures.

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Dialogue

MEN CALL IT LOVE. Edgar Selwyn has directed this Vincent Lawrence play, *Among the Married*, with decided facility and cleverness, but it remains in its movie version, what it was in the original, a light and ordinary treatment of the modern marriage scene.

Selwyn, however, was helped over some of the rougher spots by exceedingly good trouping on the part of Leila Hyams, Adolphe Menjou, Norman Foster and Mary Duncan. I haven't had much chance to observe this Foster before. I saw him briefly in one of the early Monta Bell pictures made in Long Island, *Young Man of Manhattan*, and again in *Up Pops the Devil;* but he only began seriously to engage my attention in *Men Call It Love*. He is so convincing as *Jack*, the young husband, that I completely lost myself in observing him. Leila Hyams, as always, was excellent. Menjou's role, of course, was of a stereotyped nature. The studios generally haven't come to observe that work of his in *Front Page* sufficiently closely to realize how well he lends himself to more virile roles.

▼▼ I PARTICULARLY call the attention of anyone who sees this or intends seeing it to the dialogue continuity written into it by Doris Anderson. It is by long odds one of the cleverest and most outstanding bits of dialogue adaptation that I have yet come upon in my career of viewing pictures. It is almost the first dialogue I have noticed, for one thing, which leaves the implication of the sentence to the auditor. It sparkles with bright sayings, and I had an opportunity again and again to have the meat of the sentence left to my own imaginings. The silent picture did this with its silence. I had thought it almost impossible to achieve with dialogue. But Miss Lloyd, I hasten to say, has made me change my mind.

If there was anything else I remember about this sophisticated little offering, it is perhaps that audiences out in rural America are hardly primed for it. I can see that the stage presentation in New York must have moved Mr. Selwyn to believing that it is a good thing to make into a picture. I do not see that that alone is sufficient reason for so making it. In my own work, I grow so accustomed to the bad influence of sophisticated pictures that I do not notice that aspect of it much. Occasionally, however, I talk with people who don't see as many pictures as I do, and they often have quite a different slant on the matter.

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Terrible

WOMEN OF ALL NATIONS. I am beginning to think that one of the institutions badly needed in conjunction with the peace-preserving policies of the Academy is a nut house for people who make pictures like this one. I can not conceive of a studio in its right mind either making or releasing a picture of the sort. There seems to be no one spot in its whole running that you can put your finger on as having any excuse for its existence. From beginning to end it is a trashy, vulgar, cheap, lascivious business, and I hope the civil authorities who have had censorship in their minds these past few years will happen on it and use it as a first experiment for the knife.

This is the work of the studio, incidentally, which more or less rebels at the jurisdiction of the Hays office—I have heard so from any number of its executives. I claim no particular love for the methods of the Hays office, but at least it does make an attempt at advising drastic cuts to pictures like this one before they are made, and the best advice I can think to give the Fox lot at the present time is to get in touch with that same office and go into a huddle with them before they make another *Women of All Nations.*

▼▼ THE ARGUMENT will be brought against me, I know, that I said much the same thing about *Cock-Eyed World*, which went out and did a landslide business for the studio. It is true that both these things happened. But I should like to advise any Fox executive who wishes to use this as an argument against me to go out and question the first twenty people he meets on the streets about their memory of *Cock-Eyed World*. I haven't asked twenty, but I have asked quite a few, and all of them were emphatic in declaring that it did more to antagonize them against the present regime in talking pictures than almost any other picture they could remember.

The Fox credits read "A comedy drama with the characters Flagg and Quirt, originally created by Laurence Stallings

and Maxwell Anderson." But I doubt seriously if the Messrs. Anderson and Stallings would recognize them.

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Slapsticky

STEPPING OUT. Metro has taken an old Elmer Harris play with some fairly attractive lines and bolstered what should have been a two-reel picture into a seven-reel one. But for all that, this critic of manners, customs and pictures must rate it entertainment which really entertains. Not that anyone who knows me wouldn't know why. That name Charlotte Greenwood alone would do the trick. But Leila Hyams is in it too. So is Reginald Denny. So I was thrice thrilled where only one thrill should have been.

The story is one of those concoctions which move in locale according to the movie mood of the moment. This time they've centered it in Hollywood and Agua Caliente. There's nothing like having atmosphere you're familiar with.

I'm really at a loss to tell you about it. It's like trying to describe a Mack Sennett comedy. You all know to begin with that in a picture in which Charlotte appears there will be a predominance of funny business done with her long arms and legs. I don't seem to remember that she suddenly steps over any chandeliers, but I do remember a lot of business in which Cliff Edwards tries to get her onto a chair or out of a bathtub, or into one, or something. And there was one never-to-be-forgotten scene in which Harry Stubbs rides her piggy-back around a bathing pool. That was really a little too much. I couldn't erase it after I got out of the show, and I don't want to see it again.

▼▼ THEN THERE are the usual mixups in which the wives come upon the husbands "at play" and the usual alibis to explain what the play was all about. Then the wives get some boy friends and the little circle of intrigue goes on. I can't remember exactly where it ended. Or who got who. There was a vampish person named Lillian Bond who showed some signs of knowing what a lady with screen aspirations should do before a camera; and Merna Kennedy was there, too, looking as lovely as a young girl should look—but I mustn't forget that I am a reviewer and not Stella, the Star-Gazer, so there will be no more of that.

It wouldn't be right to tell you to see this, because there is nothing there for you to see. But I can tell you that it made me laugh for an hour, and if you want to be put in a class with me, you can go and laugh, too. Or you can be haughty and stay home. I don't care.

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Yet Again

DADDY LONG LEGS. Of course you saw it on the stage. And of course you saw Mary Pickford in it. So you were pretty fed up on the story by the time this Janet Gaynor version came around. And so had I and so was I. But I did relish seeing the little Gaynor in something she could do again. There are spots in this reminiscent of *Seventh Heaven*—let no one accuse me of comparing it to that former masterpiece!—spots in which the drab little flunkey in the "home" becomes very wistful and very appealing indeed. And even some of the later business at the college, silly, inconsequential and unlikely though it may be, showed that the Gaynor star has not altogether dimmed.

But I must confess at once that Miss Gaynor was not the whole picture for me. Una Merkel and John Arledge gave me a greater kick than anyone else in it. I remember this Arledge, if I am not mistaken, from the local production of *Up Pops the Devil.* I commented on his work then. I comment on it again. He is not only a fresh type, he is a vivacious and versatile actor into the bargain. And I can think of nothing better Fox could do than search around in its morgue for a story in which he and the Merkel person may be allowed again to speak their adenoidal language.

I suppose some pronunciamento on the general ability of a picture of this sort to take in money at the box-office is necessary. It certainly should go well in the sticks, and I can well imagine even the larger city audiences paying for it for a few days, but its fate at the Carthay Circle here and its fate in New York indicate that it is not the best thing that has been made in Hollywood.

That it is, however, a sincere and nicely balanced piece of 1929 movie hokum, I freely admit.

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Russian

TRANSPORT OF FIRE. This, the latest Soviet cinema offering to be given at the Filmarte is the most Americanized story to come from their studios in some time. I am not aware whether it is a latter day production, or whether it was made in the early days of the cinema in Russia, so I am unable to tell what this emulation of our story method and star ballyhooing may indicate. Ksenia Klyaro is a slavic Lya de Putti and Fedor Slavski a sort of Conrad Nagel. As if this exploiting of personalities were not enough, there is the rough semblance of a story. A gang of revolutionists (what became of that rich word, nihilists?) is making and hiding firearms unbeknownst to the gendarmerie, but a traitor in their midst keeps giving the thing into the hands of the authorities. Then the traitor is caught and killed by the handsome hero, and the troops look in vain for the plotters. There may have been more to the story than that. I got that much by a cross examination of other witnesses who went with me, for during at least three-quarters of its running I was asleep.

Waking to the noise of the organ once or twice, I caught some pretty camera work. A shot of men on a bridge; some interesting compositions weaved from man and snow and railroad yards; some shots of wires; a shot along the barrel of a gun that is just about to shoot a man—these and a few more. Otherwise it seemed to me one of the least interesting of the Soviet productions to come to the coast. But, as one of my party said when we came out: "Bad as it was, how far it excels what we are doing!" So there you are.

The Babel of Sound Effects

By Dalton Trumbo

WITH the present debauch of sound, which continues despite the realization of producers that it has sliced their business neatly in the middle, the screen is paying the heavy price that is assessed against every art which forsakes the advantages of its own peculiar position and goes after false gods.

It has been said that the films are talking themselves to death, when in truth they are also rattling, roaring, buzzing, tapping, singing, whistling, scratching themselves toward the same melancholy destination. This babel and confusion of noises can be justified only upon the ground that it increases the atmosphere of realism—something which it does not accomplish, and toward which it should not strive.

One day, when the last producer has been sold out by his creditors, when the last director has been discovered in advanced stages of starvation and turned over to the county, when the last star has been torn limb from limb by an infuriated populace, Hollywood will realize that nothing can equal in absolute realism the realm of the legitimate stage. It will find that there is no substitute for flesh and blood, depth and color, person-to-person contact with an audience. It will, moreover, sadly discover that in frantically searching for some substitute it has forsaken completely its capability for fantasy, for romance, for those interpretations of human emotion which partake of the mental and the imaginative more than the physical and obvious.

▼▼ IT PATENTLY is absurd to question the screen's possibilities for realism, for they are immense. But realism, by its very nature, is composed of infinite gradations, and it is a rude necessity that the screen immediately set about to discover which brand it is able to interpret. If it would limit its realism to the banging of doors, the scuffling of feet, and the yell of a man who is kicked in the pants, it will continue as it is doing now, and lose a great deal more money. If, however, it develops within the circles of experienced directors, actors and writers a desire to climb to a higher plane of realism, to portray the soul and the mind of characters through sound and action, if it cares to take advantage of the legitimate stage's enormous handicap in this direction, it will move steadily upward, and in ten years—O hosannah to the Highest!—break even once more.

These conclusions have been festering in my mind for long months, and were resolved into words after having seen the fragile little romance, *Daybreak*. Here was a delicate piece shot through with a very slender thread of interest. Of all photoplays it was one which should have shunned the absolutism of reality.

The inception of the romance occurred in an open horse-drawn cab at night in Vienna. A conscientious sound director did as well as possible in registering the clump-clump-clump of the horse's hooves. The lovers became interested in each other, made mental explorations, gradually became acquainted, fell under the spell of the moonlight, yet the incessant noise of the horse's progress continued.

▼▼ IT LASTED throughout the scene, diverted the attention of a sympathetic audience from the characters to the intolerable racket, and forced upon them the knowledge that they were witnessing a theatrical production. There were fidgetings and coughs. My guest whispered that another minute of the clumping would most certainly induce madness. From that moment the picture drooped and almost died on our hands before the actual plot was well started. But realism, absolute realism, had been maintained to the desperate end.

It is a physical fact that an iron-shod horse trotting on pavement produces sound. It is also true that those near the horse hear the sound, providing, of course, they are not deaf. Thus a perfect case is built up for the director. The sound was there. Why, therefore, should it not have been recorded?

I have always understood the primary purpose of drama to consist of placing the audience in the position of the actor. If an audience forgets that it is an audience and accepts the players' difficulties as a personal problem, a dramatic success has been registered. When the hero and heroine of *Daybreak* stepped into the carriage they undoubtedly heard the hoof beats. But as they became more interested in each other, noises from without were less noticeable. There were times when their interest in each other denoted that, to them, no sound existed save that of their own voices.

▼▼ WHEN THEIR interest in each other was distracted momentarily, the hoof beats probably came to their ears. When the interest arose, they were gone again. As they neared their destination their thoughts were naturally interrupted by the incipient parting or parrying, and the sounds of an outside world became audible once mor to them. Why, one wonders, didn't the director realize their mental condition, and gradate the sound of his horse's hoofs to harmonize with it? Why weren't those infernal hoof beats reduced to their proper place, instead of usurping the attention of everyone except the two in the carriage and ruining an entire scene?

I submit as a question for debate at the next meeting of the Academy: Resolved, that the emotional reaction, tendency and intensity of characters may be completely and delicately established by their sensitiveness to external sound.

I remember vividly a funeral I attended a few years ago. It was a miserable day. Rain beat an impersonal tatoo from corner eaves and echoed through the alleys in mournful resonance. It gathered all colors in its wet embrace and neutralized them in a melancholy blear of gray. Water slid through the gutters and sprawled over the streets at overflow points. Clouds scudded low over the Santa Monica mountains and descended heavy-bellied into the very streets.

▼▼ AS I SAT in the funeral car and was driven to the cemetery I was conscious of no single sound. My mind was so filled with emotion that sound was obliterated. Rain beat upon the car top and I did not hear it. Tires hissed over wet pavements and I was oblivious. Only during those brief periods when I wrested my mind from the sad mission I was upon to specific fact did I realize that I lived in a world of sound. In a moment I escaped from it, and was once more a point in the midst of silence. The thing went even further than sound. I looked from the window and beheld not leaden

streamers of rain, but rather a merged background of gray. Only when I looked with a purpose could I distinguish raindrops.

It is a psychological fact that intense absorption deadens external effects. If directors would achieve their prime purpose of forcing us to imagine that *we* are the characters on the screen, they must recognize those psychological laws which govern our senses, and respect them. Otherwise they rob us of our box-office tribute, and will eventually deprive themselves of fairly fat salaries.

If I am sitting in a room with my wife, the sound of a door opening is very subdued, and I may deem it so unimportant as to ignore it entirely. If I am indulging in an interesting conversation, I may be unaware that the door has opened. I am not alert for sounds, hence they are not obtrusive.

If I am sitting in the same room talking with my mistress, the opening of the same door is like a revolver shot. I turn, jump, prepare for any action that may be necessary. I register perturbation and whatever else one registers when caught.

▼▼ In the realm of physics the two sounds were of equal intensity, but in the realm of my mind there were oceans of difference between them. The presentation of such differences is beyond the scope of the legitimate stage. They are not, as a matter of fact, true and absolute realism. The sounds were the same, but it is the supreme privilege of the motion picture director to present both sound and sight, not as they are, *but as they seem to be to the characters.*

Daybreak is no more vulnerable in this respect than hundreds of other pictures. It was merely the snapping point which jarred cruelly upon an already taut set of nerves. The trouble with so many otherwise excellent pictures is not sound *per se*, but the unintelligent use of sound.

Parenthetically there is still another reason why sound effects in pictures should be used cautiously and sparingly. Regardless of what the laboratories may say, sound has not been perfected. In utter heresy to this mechanical age, I maintain that it never will be. I hope, but I disbelieve. This clanking of swords, dragging of chains, clicking of glasses, roaring of airplanes, talking in open spaces—it all has a tinny effect upon my ear. I know it is not authentic and its creators know it also. In the name of heaven, then, let us have as little of it as possible.

The human voice is being recorded tolerably well—far from perfectly, but at least recognizably—but all other effects give that dank hollow ring I remember so well from having yelled into cisterns in more coltish days.

▼ ▼ ▼

STAGE

Fantasy

BALLOON. I am indebted to J. Belmar Hall, who designed the interesting settings for this latest Potboiler offering, for the information that poet Padraic Colum wrote it originally for Dudley Digges. The part of *Caspar*, however, played in this production by Donald Murray, so far overshadows the part of *Glock*, the clown, which must have been the one designed by the playwright for Digges, that I can not conceive of even a Digges ousting him for honors. The only person in the cast who contended seriously for those honors was Catherine Locke, who as *Paras Veka*, gave one of those sweetly appealing portrayals that linger in the memory like some pleasant dream. I hope someone in Hollywood with power to do so takes the proper interest in her future, for she strikes me as a young actress of talent and promise.

I can not answer for how this was taken by the few hundred people in Hollywood who were fortunate enough to see it. Hollywood has such a habit of preferring garbage to ice cream. Very Celtic, very poetic both in conception and execution, it was like some of those perfect things of Dunsany's—more poem than play, yet vastly entertaining and thought-provoking, even as play. I left it with the thought that I should like very much to read the script. Lines from it kept recurring to me from time to time for the next few days after I saw it. Perhaps it is the sympathy of blood, nationality, or what you will, but *Balloon* was, for me, one of the pleasantest intermissions in a round of humdrum playgoing I have experienced since coming to Hollywood.

It is the first of the Potboiler offerings I have seen. I shall certainly try to see that it is not the last. On the program handed me is the information that the Potboilers are badly in need of funds for further production purposes. If Hollywood only knows what is good for it it will get behind these stage experiments with all the support it has, whether it be the Potboilers, the Pasadena Playhouse, the Civic Repertory in whatever form, for these are the crucible from which it may mould its new trade—at least for the present. Of course, when it really begins making pictures again, there will be less need for this experimentation. But the talkies seem to be one of those diseases which the art of pictures must suffer until fate pronounces kill or cure. And until one or the other happens, plays like those presented by such groups as the Potboilers are invaluable as instruments of help-help.—F. D.

▼ ▼ ▼

Reviewed In This Number

DADDY LONG LEGS—

A Fox Movietone picture. Directed by Alfred Santell; from the play by Jean Webster; adapted by Sonya Levien; photographer, Lucien Andriot; recording engineers, Joseph Aiken and Donald Flick; settings by William Darling; assistant directors, Marty Santell and Ray Flynn; film editor, Ralph Dietrich.

The cast: Janet Gaynor, Warner Baxter, Una Merkel, John Arledge, Elizabeth Patterson, Kathlyn Williams, Sheila Mannors.

DUDE RANCH—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Frank Tuttle; from the story by Milton Krims; screen play by Percy Heath, Grover Jones and Lloyd Corrigan; photographer, Henry Gerrard.

The cast: Jack Oakie, Stuart Erwin, Eugene Pallette, Mitzi Green, June Collyer, Charles Sellon, Cecil Weston, George Webb, Guy Oliver, James Crane.

FINGER POINTS—

A First National picture. Directed by John Francis Dillon; adaptation by Robert Lord; dialogue by John Monk Saunders; photographer, Ernest Haller; art director, Jack Okey; wardrobe by Earl Luick; film editor, LeRoy Stone.

The cast: Richard Barthelmess, Fay Wray, Regis Toomey, Robert Elliott, Clark Gable, Oscar Apfel, Robert Gleckler.

KICK IN—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Richard Wallace; from the play by Willard Mack; screen play by Bartlett Cormack; photographer, Victor Milner.

The cast: Clara Bow, Regis Toomey, Wynne Gibson, Leslie Fenton, Donald Crisp, Paul Hurst, Juliette Compton, James Murray, Wade Boteler, Carrol Naish, Donald Mackenzie, Ben Taggart.

LADIES' MAN—

A Paramount picture: Directed by Lothar Mendes; adaptation by Rupert Hughes; screen play by Herman J.

Mankiewicz; photographer, Victor Milner.

The cast: William Powell, Kay Francis, Carole Lombard, Gilbert Emery, Olive Tell, Martin Burton, John Holland, Frank Atkinson, Maude Turner Gordon.

MAD PARADE—

A Herman M. Gumbin picture, released by Paramount. Directed by William Beaudine; from the original play by Gertrude Orr and Doris Malloy; dialogue by Henry McCarthy and Frank R. Conklin; assistant director, Gene Anderson; production manager, Sidney Algier; photographers, Charles van Enger, Glenn Kerschner, Ernie Miller; recording engineer, William Fox; sound, R. C. Clayton; effects by Carl Hernandez; film editor, Richard Cahoon; settings by Charles Cadwallader.

The cast: Evelyn Brent, Irene Rich, Louise Fazenda, Lilyan Tashman, Marceline Day, Fritzi Ridgeway, June Clyde, Elizabeth Keating, Helen Keating.

MEN CALL IT LOVE—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Edgar Selwyn; adapted from Vincent Lawrence's play, *Among The Married;* dialogue continuity by Doris Anderson; recording director, Douglas Shearer; photographer, Harold Rosson; art director, Cedric Gibbons; wardrobe by René Hubert; film editor, Frank Sullivan.

The cast: Adolphe Menjou, Leila Hyams, Norman Foster, Mary Duncan, Hedda Hopper, Robert Emmett Keane, Harry Northrup.

PARTY HUSBAND—

A First National picture. Directed by Clarence Badger; story by Geoffrey Barnes; adaptation and dialogue by Charles Kenyon; photographer, Sid Hickox; art director, John J. Hughes; film editor, Frank Ware.

The cast: Dorothy Mackaill, James Rennie, Dorothy Peterson, Joe Donahue, Donald Cook, Helen Ware, Paul Porcasi, Mary Doran.

STEPPING OUT—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Charles F. Riesner; play by Elmer Harris; dialogue by Elmer Harris and Robert E. Hopkins; photographer, Leonard Smith; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; wardrobe by René Hubert; film editor William S. Gray.

The cast: Charlotte Greenwood, Leila Hyams, Reginald Denny, Lillian Bond, Cliff Edwards, Merna Kennedy, Harry Stubbs, Richard Tucker, Kane Richmond, Wilson Benge.

SUBWAY EXPRESS—

A Columbia picture. Directed by Fred Newmeyer; from the play by Eva Kay Flint and Martha Madison; adaptation and dialogue by Earl Snell; photographer, Joseph Walker; recording engineer, E. L. Bernds; assistant director, David Selman; art director, Harrison Wiley; technical director, Edward Shulter; film editor, Arthur Huffsmith.

The cast: Jack Holt, Aileen Pringle, Fred Kelsey, Jason Robards, Alan Roscoe, William Humphrey, Ethel Wales, Bertha Blackman, Max Asher, Earl Seide, Lillianne Leighton, Maston Williams, Robert Linden, Harry Semeles, Robert St. Angelo, John Kelley, Dorothy Bay, James Goss, Sally St. Claire, Mary Gordon, Ginger Connolly, Selmer Jackson.

SVENGALI—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Archie Mayo; based on the novel by George Louis DuMaurier; screen play and dialogue by J. Grubb Alexander; photographer, Barney McGill; art director, Anton Grot; wardrobe by Earl Luick; technical effects by Fred Jackman; film editor, William Holmes.

The cast: John Barrymore, Marian Marsh, Donald Crisp, Bramwell Fletcher, Carmel Myers, Luis Alberni, Lumsden Hare, Paul Porcasi.

SWEEPSTAKES—

An RKO-Pathé picture; a Charles R. Rogers production. Directed by Al Rogell; story and adaptation by Lew Lipton; dialogue by Ralph Murphy; photographer, Edward Snyder; recording engineers, C. O'Loughlin and T. Carman; art director, Carroll Clark; costume designer, Gwen Wakeling; musical director, Arthur Lange; film editor, Joe Kane; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown.

The cast: Eddie Quillan, James Gleason, Marion Nixon, Lew Cody, Paul Hurst, Fred Burton, King Baggot, Billy Sullivan, Lillian Leighton, Mike Donlin.

THE MILLIONAIRE—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by John Adolfi; based on *Idle Hands* by Earl Derr Biggers; screen play by Julian Josephson and Maude T. Howell; dialogue by Booth Tarkington; photographer, James Van Trees; art director, Esdres Hartley; wardrobe by Earl Luick; Vitaphone orchestra conducted by Leo F. Forbstein; film editor, Owen Marks.

The cast: George Arliss, Florence Arliss, David Manners, Evalyn Knapp, James Cagney, Bramwell Fletcher, Noah Beery, Ivan Simpson, J. C. Nugent, Sam Hardy, J. Farrell MacDonald, Charles Grapewin, Charles E. Evans, Tully Marshall.

TRANSPORT OF FIRE—

A Russian picture, silent drama based on episodes of the revolt of 1905. Directed by Alexander Ivanoff; photographer, Alexander Gintzboorg.

The cast: Gleb Kuznetzov, Fedor Slavski, Nigolay Nichurin, Ksenia Klyaro, Alexei Goriushin, Lev Butarinski.

UP POPS THE DEVIL—

A Paramount picture. Directed by A. Edward Sutherland; from the play by Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich; adaptation by Arthur Kober; screen play by Eve Unsell; photographer, Karl Struss.

The cast: Skeets Gallagher, Stuart Erwin, Carole Lombard, Lilyan Tashman, Norman Foster, Edward J. Nugent, Theodore von Eltz, Joyce Compton, Eulalie Jensen, Harry Beresford, Effie Ellsler, Sleep N. Eat, Guy Oliver, Pat Moriarity, Matt Roubert.

WOMEN OF ALL NATIONS—

A Fox Movietone picture. Directed by Raoul Walsh; dialogue by Barry Connors; photography by Lucien Andriot; recording engineer, George Leverett; art director, David Hall; production manager, Archie Buchanan.

The cast: Victor McLaglen, Edmund Lowe, Greta Nissen, El Brendel, Fifi Dorsay, Marjorie White, T. Roy Barnes, Bela Lugosi, Humphrey Bogart, Joyce Compton, Jesse de Vorska, Charles Judels.

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A Methodist View

(*G. A. Atkinson in The Methodist Times, London*)

The truth about the talkies is that they are produced in a non-moral atmosphere, which is, in the strictest and most literal sense of the word, diabolical. The Devil is in full spiritual control of modern film production. That is why I used the word "anti-Christian," and described the present condition of the screen as an "anti-Christian revel."

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HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

JULY 18, 1931

The One Solution of Story Problem
Screen Art and Box-Office
Intrinsic Value of Film Shares
Stories Are Not Important
—By the Editor

Hollywood's Lost Enthusiasm
Things That Make Me Sick
Ina Claire and Tallulah Bankhead
Making Home Life More Horrible
—By Sherwood

Why Sneer at Audiences?
A Protest Against Statistics
Salvation in Sheffield
The Depressing Methodist Times
—By Trumbo

Reviewed in This Number

REBOUND
SMART MONEY
JUST A GIGOLO
GOLD-DUST GERTIE
WOMEN LOVE ONCE
CONFESSIONS OF A CO-ED

▼

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The Billionaire
Gold Star Mother
I Refuse to Answer
The Big Grey House

AVAILABLE

Management
Edward Small

The One Solution of The Story Problem

By The Editor

PAINSTAKING perusal of all that the papers have reported up to this writing, fails to convince me that the screen writers in meetings assembled even hinted at the only permanent solution of the story problem. No plan adopted will be of lasting benefit to either writers or producers unless it be of lasting benefit to motion pictures. I am not interested in writers getting more for their services or in producers giving less for their stories. My sole interest is the welfare of the screen as an institution. When its welfare is promoted there is promoted also the welfare of those who have anything to contribute to it. The main trouble at present is that the big majority of those who call themselves screen writers have nothing to contribute, and there is no legitimate reason why anyone should be interested in their welfare.

I have rather an accurate line on the abilities of Hollywood's scenarists. I read a great many treatments and scripts, and among the dark secrets of the picture world are the identities of those for whom I read them and how much I get for the services rendered. I abuse producers frightfully, but that does not keep them from paying me for making suggestions regarding their stories. At first when they began to buy my services, it was hard to get them to understand that they were not buying also favorable comment in the *Spectator*, but I think the pages of the *Spectator* bear evidence that finally they grasped that important fact. At all events, they give me to read the work of screen writers and for what they pay me I give them detailed reports containing criticisms and suggestions. And when doing the reading I've learned a lot about the mental resources of our screen writers.

▼▼ THE WRITER situation is fundamentally unsound and it is not going to be made sound by rather comical conferences between writers and producers, neither of whom have any clear idea of what ails them. To-day the studios are paying ten dollars for every two dollars' worth of story value that reaches the screen. The other eight dollars is the price producers pay for the bluff that writers put up. It is easy for a writer to fool a producer. Upon nothing else is the average producer so densely ignorant as he is on stories and their treatment. He spends money on one writer after another upon a given story, the objective being the ultimate procuring of a motion picture on paper. I have read scripts that cost those for whom they were written fifteen thousand dollars or more, and I have found them hopeless. For that much money a producer is entitled to a motion picture.

A producer will pay a stupendous and wildly ridiculous sum for a novel or a play, and then he will hire a succession of writers to endeavor to make a motion picture script from it. Some paper reports that Paramount paid a woman—I've forgotten the name—a large sum for her first book—forgotten the name of that, too—and is paying her one thousand dollars a week to adapt it to the screen, although she has had no screen experience. Is it any wonder I rave about the insanity of the film industry in general when I have an act of such extraordinary folly as that to point to?

What is Paramount after when it commits this act of financial insanity?

It is after a motion picture on paper.

Very well then—*why doesn't it buy a motion picture on paper in the first place?*

Why doesn't it tell the writers of the whole wide world that its business is to produce motion pictures, not to write them, and that it is in the market for *motion pictures*—not *stories?*

Book publishers buy books. They don't write them. Play producers buy plays. They don't write them. Why can't motion picture producers buy motion pictures?

▼▼ THERE ARE A lot of people in the world who thought it worth their while financially to learn how to write novels. Most of them found out that they couldn't write them and they gave up the idea. Others learned how, and they make a living at it. A few have grown wealthy. It is the same way with playwrights. The screen is an art as great as those of literature and the theatre. Why can't it have its own writers, people who will learn how it is done and take pride in the doing of it? I do not mean by this that it should hire people to write for it. That is what it is doing now so foolishly and with such disastrous results. I mean that it should adopt a policy of buying only complete motion pictures on paper, and it soon would develop a corps of writers who would master screen technic and express themselves in it.

Let me here answer the first and most absurd argument against the suggestion that producers will advance—that the announcement of such a policy would be followed by an avalanche of manuscripts that would swamp the studios. Out of every ten dollars that producers spend now in payment to contract writers and free lances, for adaptors, continuity writers and the like, they could save nine and spend one in taking care of the avalanche. In any event, the avalanche would not last long and soon would assume proportions that do not prove too cumbersome now for book publishers and

WELFORD BEATON, EDITOR VOL. 12, NO. 3 ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, ASSOCIATE
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play producers. General broadcasting of the information that only complete scripts would be considered would put an end to the flood of other things.

▼▼ AT THE PRESENT time plays are written and produced in New York for no reason other than to tease a big price out of motion picture producers. The playwright knows that if he told his story in motion picture language he would not get one tenth the price for it as original screen material that he could get for it as a produced play. Why, then, should he go to the trouble of learning the motion picture language? It would be a foolish thing for him to do. But let that playwright discover that Hollywood no longer bought produced plays, that it bought only complete motion picture continuities, and soon there would be another trained screen writer competing for Hollywood gold.

Out of the several hundred screen writers now in Hollywood the handful who know how to prepare a story for the screen would have nothing to fear from such a revolution as I suggest. Quite the reverse. They could just about control the story market. Before the New York playwright had time to learn the requirements of screen art, he would seek out a writer already trained and would pay him to write the story directly for the screen. That, however, would be no concern of the picture producer. All that he would be in the market for would be complete scripts and it would make no difference to him where they came from or who wrote them.

▼▼ FOR THE STUDIOS there would be no more contract writers. No more treatments. No more story conferences. No more continuity writers. None of the tremendous expense that these things involve. There would be the same competition for desirable screen material. The competition would begin when a given story, play or book was put into form for shooting. At present the studios have no difficulty in agreeing not to employ some director who has offended one studio by refusing to work for what it offered. It should not be difficult to get them to agree not to buy anything except complete continuities and to refrain from bidding for material until it was in script form.

And the reform could be put into effect simply and without creating any disturbance. The present scrambled and expensive system could be continued until the announcement of the producers began to yield results. Writing staffs could be diminished as the supply of available scripts increased, until finally there would be enough scripts to supply the demand and then the writing staffs would disappear entirely. On every lot there would be perhaps a half dozen script doctors, writers who could remedy little weaknesses in the purchased material. All such weaknesses would be little, for a script with big weaknesses would not be purchased until the author himself removed them.

▼▼ IN TIME THE studios would find themselves considering only complete continuities. There would be no more wondering if a motion picture could be made from a given story. The script itself would settle all such speculation. The screen would take its right place among the other arts. Its intellectual standard would be raised to match that of the others, for it would command the best brains of the world. It would get away from its present stereotyped way of doing things. Pictures are monotonously alike now, not because all the stories are alike, but because the same few people put all of them into form for shooting. With the adoption of the plan that I suggest the inventive brains of the world would seek Hollywood as a market for their ideas.

Book publishers do not buy ideas for novels as Hollywood buys ideas for pictures. They do not pay authors huge sums for suggestions and then pay other writers huge sums for making novels out of them. Hollywood pays an author more for a story in book form than it should pay for a motion picture in script form, and then it pays a sum as great to have someone write a motion picture from it. Only the grotesquely managed film industry could do such a fool thing. The principal economic consideration in connection with the purchase of raw material is its adaptability to quick and inexpensive handling when it is becoming an element of the finished product. When Paramount wants a piece of lumber of a certain size it does not purchase a sawlog. The firm that sells the lumber knows Paramount's requirements and supplies the lumber in the dimensions that make it available for use with a minimum of handling in the studio.

▼▼ THE WHOLE idea back of the plan I suggest is to get Paramount to buy its stories as intelligently as it buys its lumber—to buy them only when they are put into a form that reduces their handling to a minimum as they are being made into motion pictures. I don't see why a screen author should not be asked to do something that a sawmill does without being asked.

The institution of this reform would not disturb those authors, scenarists and continuity writers who know anything about their jobs. Just as many screen stories would have to be written and just as many continuities prepared. The only people who would suffer are those who bluff their way onto studio pay-rolls, the large majority of screen writers who know nothing about the fundamentals of screen writing, but who make their living at it because no one knows how ignorant they are. The others would keep employed constantly, but their employers no longer would be the studios. They would work for the owners of the stories or as partners of the authors. There would be an improvement in the condition of those serious writers who are of value to the screen, and about the rest no one need worry.

What Price Art?

SOME SIX or seven years ago I wrote: "The screen will achieve success as a business only to the extent that it attains perfection as an art." That was before I started the *Spectator*. Since then in the pages of the *Spectator* I have said the same thing in a great many different ways. I was aware every time I used the word "art" as applied to the screen I was evoking the hollow laughter of producers whose fondest delusion is that the screen is a business, not an art. They have ignored the art and treated picture mak-

ing as a business, with the result that they have attained precious little art and now have precious little business.

Everyone is trying his hand at diagnosing the ills of the industry and suggesting a remedy that will make it well again. "Hollywood's greatest need is for good stories in sufficient quantity," is B. P. Schulberg's diagnosis; and his remedy: "This problem is being solved gradually through the acquisition of more outside material, such as best-selling novels and hit plays, and an alert seeking-out of capable story minds as they show themselves within or outside the industry."

▼▼ THE EFFICACY of a remedy depends upon the accuracy of the diagnosis. In this case the diagnosis is wrong. Never before in its history has the screen given us such good stories as it is giving us now; and now, as always, the supply of good stories is unlimited. Stories are important in the minds of producers only because they do not know what kind of business they are in. They think it is one of selling stories to the public, whereas its business is to sell motion pictures. There's a vast difference. A motion picture is a work of art, and its story merely is one of the materials that enter into its composition. The success of the picture does not depend as much upon the excellence of the story as it does upon the quality of the craftsmanship revealed in the mastery of all the elements of which the creation is composed.

Let me make one final effort to impress upon those who make our pictures the commercial significance of screen art and the importance of its application to their product. I approach the task with no hope of success, for the minds that were responsible for the present financial distress of the film industry, are incapable of grasping the reason for their failure. If they knew what is the matter with them, there wouldn't be anything the matter with their business. However, let us proceed.

▼▼ I LIKE LONDON. There is something there to cater to every mood. Many times I was impelled by an esthetic urge to walk from my hotel down the Strand and across Trafalgar Square to the National Gallery, where I would sit for a half an hour, or perhaps longer, before Constable's *Hay Wain*, my favorite of all the landscapes painted by the great English artist. His extraordinary skill at handling light and shade to show us objects as he saw them, the house by the pond, the wagon and horses in the water, the trees in the left background, the sky in the right background, the walking dog in the foreground with its head turned towards its owner in the wagon—these, and a boat and shadows of tree trunks in the water, the marvelous coloring of the father of modern English landscape painting, combined to provide me with entertainment of which I never tired.

Had I come across the farm that Constable painted, had I assembled the objects as they are assembled on the canvas—in other words, had I seen in real life the story that Constable tells within the frame of the picture—I can't imagine that it would have held my gaze for even a moment, and if I remarked it at all, no doubt I would have thought it unattractive.

▼▼ IT WAS NOT Constable's story—every work of any art is a story of some sort—that held me, not the wagon and the horses, the dog, the pond, the trees and the sky. I feasted my eyes many times on that painting because there was exquisite pleasure for me in the contemplation of the *art* that Constable displayed, the way he made me see things as he saw them.

One day in Milan I entered the refectory in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie to view Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. I wanted to see the original because in the Royal Academy, London, I had seen the finest copy in existence, that painted by Marco d'Oggiono, Da Vinci's pupil, and had been fascinated by the extraordinarily expressive hands of the disciples. I was curious to see if they were as expressive in the original as in the copy.

▼▼ DOES ANYONE suppose that in real life I would have gone out of my way to look at the hands of some quite ordinary-looking men? Again it was *art* that I was contemplating.

If you were walking along a street in Amsterdam and encountered the men of the *Night Watch* grouped exactly as Rembrandt grouped them, would you stand spell-bound before them as you stand spell-bound before that great canvas? Of course not. You are not interested in the men. You are held solely by the *art* of the great Dutch painter. You admire the manner in which he makes you feel that you are looking at the real people. If the real people were put in front of you, however, you would have no interest in them.

Constable did not gain his fame from a barnyard. He gained it by the skill with which he *presented* a barnyard. Corot has not sold tree-lined roads of France to the world;

IN THE NEXT SPECTATOR

▼

The Editor Discusses—

What Makes Audiences Laugh?
Music's Place in Motion Pictures
What the Box-Office Needs
Picture Stocks As An Investment

Mr. Sherwood Writes About—

Dude Ranch in Hollywood
Lubitsch—The Teutonic Gaul
Don't Mention the Weather
Mr. Beaton's Literary Lumber
The Sprayer of Flit

Mr. Trumbo's Subjects—

A Review of Drinkwater's Biography of Carl Laemmle
Dialogue and Audience Disagreement
Dramatic Values of Silence
Are Writers Gentlemen?

Reviews of Several Pictures—Among them *A Free Soul, White Shoulders, Branded, Wild Horse, Man In Possession, Tabu, The Girl Habit, Big Business Girl, Chances, Public Defender, Three Who Loved, Night Angel.*

An Article by Monitor, entitled *The Blue Horizon*, announced to appear in this issue of the *Spectator*, unfortunately has been crowded out and will appear in the next number.

he has left a name that always will be remembered because he combined extraordinary technic and artistic imagery in *presenting* such roads.

▼▼ THE SCREEN will get nowhere by trying to sell stories to the public. For three years it has been trying to do it, with the result that within two years every producing organization in business to-day will be out of the hands that control it now. It departed from the art that always was the only thing it had to sell, and began to tell the public stories by word of mouth. The story is to the motion picture as the hay wain was to Constable—something that gains value only from the treatment accorded it.

It would seem, therefore, that Hollywood should concern itself more with the treatment of a story than with its plot, for it is the treatment, not the plot, that becomes the motion picture. Apply the fundamental principles of screen art to almost any story and you will have a box-office picture. Ignore screen art, as the talkies are doing, and out of the best stories you can not get box-office pictures. As I have said, our stories are better now than they ever have been—and the industry is going broke. Our incompetent executives, in seeking story material, think only in terms of what they find on paper, and are totally incapable of translating into screen language what they find there.

▼▼ WHEN PRODUCERS first deserted screen art and began to make talkies, almost any story made into a picture attracted large audiences. When the fact that audible dialogue had no place in a motion picture was becoming apparent to the public, the producers were getting better stories and preparing them for the screen with more intelligence. This improvement in the talkies as talkies held attendance on a level for a time, but about a year ago the public began to tire of even perfection in something in itself fundamentally imperfect, and there was a sharp decline in box-office receipts. To offset it producers decided that they must get still better stories, and that is impossible, as the stories they are producing now are as good as they can find.

In seeking a way out, producers sought stories that were strong enough dramatically to support the box-office. Thus gangster pictures came into being, and pictures that dealt strongly in sex. They presented to the public every dramatic climax that could be conceived—and still box-office receipts continue on the down grade. Instead of recognizing the fact that receipts were small because screen art was missing from their creations, they concluded that they did not have enough drama in their stories, and as they can not find stories with more drama in them, they yell their heads off about a story shortage. If they would realize that it is screen *art* that the public wants, and that it can be applied in salable quantity to almost any story, they would be making a big step towards the rehabilitation of the box-office.

It was not Constable's discovery of a farmyard with a pond in it that made *Hay Wain* a great painting. Nor is the discovery of a story with a punch in it all that is necessary to the making of a great motion picture. In each case success depends upon the degree of art that is applied when the creation is being fashioned.

Kent and Schulberg

VARIOUS FILM papers have it that S. R. Kent, the head of the sales end of the Paramount organization, will have direct supervision over B. P. Schulberg, who produces the pictures that Mr. Kent is given to sell. I can't believe this report. Adolf Zukor, president of Paramount, permits his company to do a lot of exceedingy ridiculous things, but I can not imagine his allowing it to do anything as ridiculous as permitting a sales department to dictate to a producing department.

Of course I know that a lot of the old thread-worn arguments will be advanced to show why a salesman should dictate production—salesmen are in touch with the public and know what the public wants,—and a lot of other stuff like that, all of which is the veriest rot. Salesmen know nothing about the desires of the public. They know what a given picture did at the box-office, but they don't know why. Sidney Kent has no more idea how a picture should be made than I have how an airplane engine should be constructed. Paramount's product is bad enough now, but it would become fearful if New York salesmen were put in a position to dictate to Hollywood producers.

Any interference with existing production methods must be the outgrowth of dissatisfaction with the product that is being turned out. Paramount pictures are not doing well at the box-office, but Ben Schulberg is not to blame for that. The blame attaches to the whole rotten system that the motion picture industry has built up. The box-office situation is deplorable because the whole industry went insane when the sound camera was handed to it. If Ben Schulberg had tried to turn out pictures that would have done well at the box-office, S. R. Kent would have put up a violent protest. For the last three years Hollywood has been turning out the kind of pictures that New York salesmen wanted, with the result that the industry is in a desperate financial condition. It will return to prosperity only if the salesmen keep their hands off.

Picture Stocks

A CORRESPONDENT who tells me that he is a broker through whom many people have invested in motion picture stocks, takes me to task for saying in a recent *Spectator* that there is not a film security on the market to-day that is worth what it is quoted at. "Don't you think," enquires the broker, "that you should stick to the artistic side of pictures, about which you seem to know something, and keep away from their financial side, about which you know nothing? I know your paper is read in Hollywood. Many of my clients read what you wrote and have grown nervous about their investments in picture shares. As the financial statements of all the companies are available to me, I am in a position to demonstrate to my clients how wrong you are, and I suggest that you go to the same source for information before you make any more wild statements."

I repeat: There is not a motion picture share on the market to-day that is worth the price that it is quoted at. Intrinsically motion picture shares are worthless. The financial statements that apparently give them value, are the keenest comedies that the industry has turned out. It is a gamble whether the holders of such stocks ever will realize anything from them. Next year none of the companies will earn enough to meet its dividend requirements, and the gamble consists of the chance that the bankers who have their hands at the throats of the industry, somehow will find money to pay dividends as they did recently in the case of the Fox company.

▼▼ ALL THE investment value films have depends upon the whim of bankers. Wall Street could take over all the companies to-day if it wanted to. Until it wants to, no doubt dividends in some amount will be paid, but next year's dividends will not be paid from this year's earnings, for not one of the companies is going to make any money this year. Perhaps, again as in the case of the Fox company, annual statements will indicate profits, but the accounting staffs, not the producing and selling staffs, will be responsible for the satisfactory showings. Rapidly approaching is the time when the banks will stop juggling with the film companies and will take them over as just another step in the program planned when Wall Street first began to lend money to Hollywood. This move will be made at a time when liquidation of the companies will show that there are just enough assets to reimburse the banks and not enough over to make the stock worth anything.

The film industry is the most mismanaged in the country, and it depends for its success upon being the best managed. It is unlike all other industries. A shoe manufacturer makes certain styles of shoes. They are put upon the market, and the manufacturer's problem becomes one of duplication of his product and the maintenance of its standard. These are purely physical things that can be established as part of the factory routine. With his sales force properly organized and managed, the manufacturer is justified in regarding his business as permanent, and he can maintain his level of dividends which gives stock in his company a definite and practically fixed value. This value is maintained largely by machines.

▼▼ BUT THE plodding efficiency with which the shoe company is managed will not do for the film industry. Here we have no duplication of product. Every article offered for sale is a fresh financial adventure. Instead of being a duplication of all that has been offered before, it must go to the other extreme and differ as widely as possible. Perfection attained in turning out one unit of production can not be maintained thereafter by machines. Such a condition in an industry demands the greatest intelligence in its management. Pictures have the most unintelligent management that any business on earth ever was handicapped with. I can't go into here all the things that have been done to the picture business by those who control it. It would take a whole *Spectator* to handle that job.

My opinion that film stocks are worth nothing is based upon the fact that the business of all the companies is falling off at an alarming rate, and that every one of them is turning out the same kind of product this year that ruined the business last year. The same management that started the business on its downward course still is managing it, and it is a management that never has had the faintest conception of what kind of business it is. In two years at the most the banks will be in complete control of the major organizations. The prospect need give Hollywood no concern. It always will make pictures, always will be the world's greatest production center and box-offices everywhere will contribute to the prosperity that it always will enjoy.

Reviews

FOR A COUPLE of months the *Spectator* will be more or less lazy about seeking out new pictures for review. My personal inclinations are against putting myself under obligations to producers by asking them to show me their product in projection rooms; they refuse to let me know when they hold previews in theatres, and I refuse to journey from the coolness of the beach to the heat of downtown Los Angeles to catch first runs. I hope readers will permit me without protest to wait until the pictures come to the neighborhood houses within the limits of my physical inclinations. Ultimately I will get around to reviewing all the pictures worth seeing and a lot more that aren't.

My own conception of the reviews I write for the *Spectator* is that the time element is not important. I do not regard them as guides to those looking for screen entertainment. Rather my aim is to take pictures apart and suggest what their producers could have done to make them better. If you read my reviews with that thought in mind, it will matter little to you how long the reviews appear after the pictures are released.

Dalton Trumbo will endeavor to keep up to date with his reviews. When I first approached the young man on the serious business of becoming a member of the *Spectator* staff, he said that he couldn't qualify for the job as he knew nothing about pictures. I told him that that was his chief recommendation, as I wanted someone who would be governed in his reviews solely by the degree of entertainment he derived from the pictures and not by technical knowledge of film production. I'm beginning to feel that Trumbo fooled me. He seems to know his subject. Anyway, his reviews are written charmingly and are well worth reading, even if you are not interested in the pictures he discusses.

More About Stories

THANKS TO the interest the new *Spectator* has aroused I don't have to spend much time thinking up things to write about. The mailman brings them to me. For instance, here is a letter from an associate producer stating that he does not agree with me when I say that stories are not important.

Commercially, and in their relation to the whole activity of the producing end of motion pictures, stories are important. If a man in a hurry walks four miles in the wrong direction, the walk is important even though it is a sheer waste of time. Stories are important for the same reason. They occupy so

much studio thought that they have a bearing upon the cost of pictures out of all proportion to the value of what they contribute. All the story difficulties are due to one reason—executive incompetency. Executives who don't know a story when they read it and don't know what to do with one when they get it, are responsible for the so-called story shortage, the blame for which they pass on to the writers of the world.

▼▼ To the messy manner in which stories are handled is due the fact that in a great many cases better stories are thrown away than reach the screen. A story with real possibilities in it is purchased. The possibilities are apparent in the first treatment, because up to that time only writers have had contact with the story. Then it begins. The production head thinks the story would be improved if the girl were given a drunken aunt to provide comedy relief, and his yes-men have ideas equally brilliant. Finally when the thing reaches the screen we find that the original story was thrown away and in its place we have the drunken aunt and the other afterthoughts. In a great many cases, however, nothing reaches the screen, as the picture possibilities diminish with each treatment until even a production executive is not dull enough to fail to recognize that there are no screen values left.

I know of one studio that offered another a large sum for the first treatments of a number of stories that later had died while they were being operated on by incompetent executives. B wanted the stories in their original form in which they had merit, but A added to the price it asked for them the full cost of the murdering process, and the deal fell through.

But I persist in the claim that as screen art is what the industry must sell if it hopes to become prosperous again, the story is comparatively unimportant. In one sense stories are important — because they are what the industry is buying. They become unimportant when we consider that they are not what the industry is selling.

Happy Endings

Somewhere in the pile of just-read film papers that sprawls on the floor by the easy chair in which I think, read and write, is a publication that reports a speech made by someone to a gathering of exhibitors. I would seek out the paper and give you the name of the speaker, but Stingy, our Scotch terrier puppy, is asleep on the pile and I don't like to disturb him. And, anyway, if I leaned over far enough to reach the pile, I would disturb the orange Persian kitten that is in my lap enjoying a sleep in his favorite place beneath the pad upon which I write. When it approaches midnight the animals seek me out. Virgil, my old fox terrier whose friendship for me goes back for over a decade, occupies the depths of another big chair and looks at me shamefacedly because Charles, our large black cat, has coiled himself in a napping position in the same big chair. Virgil tolerates cats, but he refuses to recognize them as social equals. For him it is not a happy ending of the peaceful day we had together, but for me it holds as much happiness as ending days can offer me now.

In the speech I referred to, the speaker summed up the ills of motion pictures and suggested the remedies that would make them well. Only one thing I remember—that unhappy endings are definitely out, that a picture with such an ending has no chance of success at the box-office. He uses the term, "unhappy ending", in the same manner as it is used in Hollywood during those grave discussions that reveal how little the participants know what they're talking about. In a properly told screen story a logical succession of events can lead logically to but one ending, and that is the ending the story must have. It is the only ending that will appeal to the intelligent members of an audience, and as the intelligent members greatly out-number the unintelligent, the box-office is served better when the story ends logically.

▼▼ Whether a story should have a happy ending is not debatable, but let us assume that it is. No doubt the speaker whose utterances are reported in the publication upon which the puppy slumbers, meant by "unhappy" endings those stories that left in distress the characters who carried our sympathy. But suppose the events lead logically to such a conclusion, would this orator distort the ending to make the characters happy? Whom is he trying to please, the characters or the audience? To be completely satisfactory to those who view it, a picture must end as the audience wants it to end. *An American Tragedy* ends "unhappily". There is no other possible ending. Such being the case, is it not a "happy" ending for an audience that has employed its intelligence in following the story? *Clyde* no doubt would be happier of he were not condemned to death, but the audience would be dissatisfied, and of the two I think the audience is the more important.

Virgil's day is ending unhappily because Charles is in the chair beside him. I think it is a delightful ending, all the animals bringing their friendship to me, wanting to be with me to give me that companionship that is rooted in affection for me. I like to see Virgil and Charles in the same chair. I support them and give them a good home because I enjoy their company. What makes Virgil unhappy makes me happy, but surely I am entitled to that much.

The puppy has awakened and is in my lap, having a fight with the kitten. At least it is what they pretend is a fight. But I won't bother looking for the film paper now. The name of the orator doesn't matter.

Decent Hours

There's going to be a revolution in Hollywood motion picture studios on the twelfth of August. On that date there goes into effect the new state law governing the working hours of girls employed in studios. Like all reforms, this one was brought about by abuses. At present girls are overworked disgracefully. Selfish executives receiving salaries many times what they are worth, have no consideration for their secretaries who have to appear for work several hours before their employers arrive and continue to work until their employers go home. In the other offices where female help is employed, conditions are just as bad.

Metro has a favorite method of stealing hours from tired girls who work in its stenographic department. The department is under-staffed so that nightly girls have to work from

two to four hours overtime. They get no pay for this. They are told to keep track of the overtime and are promised that at some time in the future they will be given holidays in duration matching the hours they have overworked. They never get these holidays. Such conditions do not prevail on the Fox lot. There the girls in the stenographic department are treated with consideration and reasonable hours are the rule. On the Paramount lot conditions are bad. There are more cases of nervous breakdowns there than on any other lot. Warner Brothers, of course, try to squeeze the utmost hours of work out of their girls.

▼▼ THE NEW law provides that girls must work but eight hours each day to earn their weekly salaries. They may work four hours overtime for which they must be paid time and one half. Under no circumstances will they be permitted to work more than four hours in excess of their regular eight-hour day. If they are called back to work at night they must be supplied with their dinners at the expense of the studios.

The producers opposed the passage of the law as they can not see that stealing hours from lowly employees is about the meanest form of pilfering known to man. The alert girls are aware that their employers will offer the same opposition to the operation of the law as they did to its enactment. Every device will be resorted to to make the measure innocuous, but its terms are specific and the girls intend to see that it is enforced. To help them in this worthy endeavor the *Spectator* offers its assistance. If the girls will report to it every infraction of the law that comes to light, the *Spectator* will give it publicity and in each instance the source of the *Spectator's* information will be considered as something strictly confidential.

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THESE I'VE SEEN—

Rebound

THERE IS ONE love scene in *Rebound* that of itself gives the picture distinction. It is acted with exquisite tenderness by Ina Claire and Robert Williams, and directed with rare understanding by E. H. Griffith. A tribute, too, must be paid to the artistic values lent it by Norbert Brodine's superb photography. It is one of the many beautifully done bits that make *Rebound* an outstanding production. Horace Jackson made the adaptation from a Donald Ogden Stewart play. The dialogue throughout fairly scintillates, being rich in humor, terse and intelligent. Carroll Clark, the art director, contributed some highly satisfactory sets. We never have had a talkie directed more capably, nor one in which the performances were more creditable.

For downright smartness *Rebound* is matched only by *Holiday*, also directed by Ned Griffith. As a comedy *Rebound* excels *Holiday*, consequently there is more diverting entertainment in the new picture than in its predecessor. *Rebound* has more audience appeal as it provokes more laughter. If the public wants its screen stories told in dialogue, if this form of screen entertainment is legitimate and fundamentally sound—if it has any hope of permanence—if it is to be instrumental in restoring prosperity to the film industry—then *Rebound* will remain at the Carthay Circle theatre longer than *Holiday* remained there.

▼▼ IF THE *Spectator's* contention is correct; if on account of their fundamental weakness talkies will not continue to entertain the public—if the industry's persistence in making them can serve only to add to its financial worries—then *Rebound's* run will be shorter than *Holiday's*.

Holiday ran at the *Carthay Circle* for nine weeks. *Rebound* will not run for more than four weeks. I am writing this two days after *Rebound's* opening, although it will not reach *Spectator* readers until the four weeks are just about up. (Later—*Rebound's* run was three weeks, three days.)

Rebound is not box-office. It is an almost perfect example of a variety of entertainment that the public does not want, a variety it endured for a time on account of its novelty, but which, because it is not true screen art, can not continue to entertain audiences that want motion pictures. I say this even though *Rebound* delighted me. It is not a motion picture, and its only weaknesses are the results of its attempts to be one. The charm of the opening sequence lies in the fact that the whole story is planted in conversations that take place at a breakfast table. The members of a house-party come and go, indulge in clever and witty remarks, and all the time breakfast goes on.

▼▼ A SEQUENCE of this sort should have been presented in a manner that would have led us to believe that the breakfast was the most important feature of it. If an effort had been made to persuade us that the coffee was more important than the conversation, we would have thought a great deal more of the conversation. Audiences will enjoy the sequence because they are not trained to look for a display of high intelligence in the presentation of talkies; they would enjoy it much more if its treatment had revealed a greater understanding of its values. Instead of the dialogue being secondary in importance to the serious business of having breakfast, it is trotted out to the front through the medium of a series of close-ups which seem to say "Just listen to the clever things these people are saying." Witty lines are spoken by characters who appear to be concentrating upon making them witty. If one of them had been spoken absently by a character whose chief thought seemed to be on the desirability of one more lump of sugar in his coffee, it would have sounded much more witty.

Throughout the production close-ups are resorted to constantly to rob the film of pictorial effectiveness that with more intelligent editing would have been retained. Lines always convey their own meanings. The mission of the camera in a talkie is to present the effect of the lines, to show us a character's reaction to what is said. The photographic emphasis should be on the listener, not on the speaker. In *Rebound* almost invariably we have close-ups of the speaker.

▼▼ BOTH MISS Claire and Williams give magnificent performances. Robert Ames, who apparently is doomed always

to play himself, does it in his usual competent manner. Merna Loy is a revelation in the first smart role I have seen her play. I hope she is presented with more such opportunities. She has the ability, personality and appearance.

RKO-Pathé has reached the peak of its ability to present talkies, but it still is a long way from doing anything to relieve box-office conditions. It is going to have rough financial sledding if it places its reliance in *Holidays* and *Rebounds*. In Ann Harding, Constance Bennett and Ina Claire it has three of the most expensive stars in pictures and it is going to lose a lot of money on them. The seriousness of its situation lies in the fact that these talented young women are given no opportunities to learn screen acting. They appear only in photographed plays which are diminishing in box-office value as their quality improves. Charlie Rogers can't give us a better talkie than *Rebound*, and if it returns its production cost, Pathe' may consider itself lucky.

Hiram Brown borrowed six million dollars to keep Radio going. He'd better arrange for an additional sixty million if he never is going to wake up to the fact that the public wants motion pictures.

Tarnished Lady

THOSE PRODUCERS who are kind enough to show me their pictures in projection rooms tell me that I lose something when I do not see them in regular theatres, because when I sit by myself to view them I do not get the benefit of audience reaction. For several weeks I did not view pictures, and many that I would have seen in projection rooms were released before I got around to them. One of them was *The Tarnished Lady*. The criticisms of it that I had read treated it very harshly, but I wanted to see Tallulah Bankhead, who, all the critics agreed, gave a splendid performance. And when it came to one of the beach houses I availed myself of the opportunity to see it.

First I was treated to a newsreel that I had seen already. Then considerable footage was devoted to exploiting the attractions that were to follow. Next came two Paramount shorts that were fearful. They made me want to scream. And by the time the feature picture started I was in a defiant mood. I already had listened to more talk than I could stand with complacency.

▼▼ THE FACT THAT Miss Bankhead's performance earned my admiration is a tribute to its excellence. She reminded me in turn of the late Jeanne Eagels, of Greta Garbo and of Marlene Dietrich. Her features, her personality, her voice and her gestures fascinated me. I do not know what her picture program is, but I predict for her a brilliant career on the screen if she elects to try it. Clive Brook contributed to *Tarnished Lady* another of his highly competent performances. He and Miss Bankhead appear to good advantage in each other's company. Osgood Perkins is another who is to be credited with fine work; and Phoebe Foster is exceedingly effective in a rather unsympathetic part.

The story of the *Tarnished Lady* is just about as good as we are getting nowadays in talkies, and much better than the ordinary run of talkies that we used to get in silent days. But I can understand why the critics did not like the picture. It is a good talkie, but both critics and the public have tired of talkies. George Cukor, who directed, made it more of a talkie than there was any necessity for. It does not remotely resemble a motion picture, being nothing but a series of photographed conversations. In itself the picture is worthy, but it is just another one of the productions that are driving the film industry into bankruptcy. It has to its credit some isolated examples of admirable lighting, and gorgeous photography, and only in that regard did it differ from most of the talkies.

It is a very good example of the kind of pictures that Paramount must stop making if it expects to meet its financial obligations.

Smart Money

A NEW YORK dispatch to *The Hollywood Reporter* a couple of weeks ago, stated that exhibitors were trying to figure out why *Smart Money* was proving a success: "Is it the gambling element or is it still the combination of gangsters, racketeers and underworld?" asked the dispatch, which I happened to read just after I had seen the picture. I think I can put the exhibitors out of their misery. *Smart Money* is proving to be a box-office draw because the story is told very largely by the camera. Alfred E. Green, who directed, was trained in the silent days of the pictures, and he knows that the camera is of far more importance even to a talkie than is the dialogue. He gives us things to look at, things that have story value. Only the use of the camera as the story-telling medium will bring prosperity back to the film industry. If producers were people who could learn anything, they could find a valuable lesson in this Warner production.

Smart Money is practically a one-man characterization. It is all Edward G. Robinson, and he handles his part admirably. Robinson is a real actor. Always behind his work you know there is an active brain. I don't know Robinson, and I have seen him only in lowbrow parts, but his various performances have convinced me that he is a man of keen intelligence, and one who regards his calling as an intellectual pursuit that yields returns to the extent that the intellect is enlisted as an aid to his work. In the hands of such a capable director as Green, he appears to his best advantage. We do not get the impression that he is an actor strutting through his part. Green also is responsible for excellent performances by all the members of his cast.

▼▼ IF YOU ARE in the habit of reading the *Spectator* from the beginning to the end, you already have read this sentence in an article in this issue which carries the heading, *What Price Art?*: "The success of a picture does not depend as much upon the excellence of the story as it does upon the quality of the craftsmanship revealed in the mastery of all the elements of which the creation is composed." I wrote that before I saw *Smart Money*, which I now can point to as illustrating exactly what I meant. On the whole the story is absurd. Of the eight or ten items upon which I base this

indictment I will point out two. Robinson runs a gambling resort in which hundreds of people stake their money nightly, yet the district attorney informs us that for six months he has been trying to get into the place. And then, when he finally does procure a key by violating his oath of office, his men raid the place and break in from the outside. Just what prevented him smashing the windows a long time before is not made plain.

The second item: All pictures must show that crime does not pay. Robinson runs the public gambling joint, consequently he is a criminal. Just before the fade-out we see him going to jail for manslaughter, as a man he knocked out struck his head against something and died. The moral of the picture, therefore, is that if you become a gambler, you will make a lot of money, but ultimately you will go to jail for manslaughter.

And still *Smart Money* is a rattling, good picture, fast-moving entertainment that I enjoyed all the way through, even though I was aware of the absurdities of the story. The picture is drawing big audiences purely because of the intelligent treatment accorded it by Green in his direction. Under the direction of one of these gentlemen whom Hollywood has brought from the stage, *Smart Money* would be merely another talkie that would attract no attention. In the hands of a thoroughly trained motion picture director, it is composed largely of real motion picture technic, the one thing that the public always is willing to buy.

Women Love Once

HERE IS A Paramount picture that will do little towards dispersing the gloom of the box-office, even though it contains splendid performances by Paul Lukas, Eleanor Boardman, Juliette Compton and Geoffrey Kerr, and beautiful photography by Karl Struss. Edward Goodman directed. I am not familiar with Goodman's background, but what I saw on the screen convinces me that he is from the stage. This will explain the fact that nearly all the dialogue is spoken with stage artificiality, and that throughout we have the impression that we are looking at actors going through parts, instead of attaining an illusion of real people, as we do when we're looking at a picture directed with regard for screen fundamentals. Stage direction also is responsible for the fact that *Women Love Once* is just another talkie, just another example of the kind of screen entertainment that the public already has demonstrated most emphatically that it no longer wants.

Women Love Once is a psychological drama in which the psychology is not developed. It is taken for granted. In the opening sequence Lukas is shown as a home-loving, steady-going, companionable husband with an undeveloped flair for art. He goes to Paris and studies for one year. At the end of that time he comes home with free-living ideas that would take a normal man at least twenty years to accumulate. In this one brief year Lukas becomes an entirely different person, an impossible transformation in the man who is planted in the opening sequence, and in any event one that would require many years to develop.

▼▼ ALL THE SITUATIONS are mechanical. We have one of those crazy scenes in which a woman, supposedly in her right mind, runs frantically through the streets without attracting the attention of anyone; and then one of those fearfully distressing scenes in which a little girl is run over by an automobile, both of which are entirely unnecessary. I don't know how the picture will appeal to others, but it failed totally to awaken my sympathy for any of the characters. I was indifferent to both their joys and their sorrows.

Paramount gave the picture its usual superb production, and in several places there are examples of expert cutting, fitting scenes together to expedite the action, but these merits do not compensate for the artificiality of the whole thing. The work of Lukas is superb, and I never saw Eleanor Boardman give a finer performance on the screen. In this picture I saw Geoffrey Kerr for the first time, and he impressed me as being a most capable actor.

Up for Murder

WILL SOMEONE on the Universal lot kindly tell me what happened to Monta Bell's fine newspaper story out of which such a gripping silent picture was made? I dropped into a neighborhood house the other night to see something that was called *Up For Murder*, and in which Lew Ayres was starred. I found that both the story and the direction were attributed to Bell, and when the first scene showed printing presses at work I anticipated a treat, for I knew that the story was good and I consider Bell to be one of the best directors in the business. When I found that things were happening that did not fit into my memory of what had happened in the silent version, I recalled that Bell left for the East as soon as shooting had been completed, and that various reports had seeped out of the studio that several people were doctoring his picture.

This satisfied me that Bell was not to blame for the fact that *Up For Murder* is dull and uninteresting. In the original story the character of the boy, around whom all the events revolve, was drawn with care, and the psychology of the part developed in a capable manner. Apparently the doctoring process removed all trace of these merits from the version I saw. I have no quarrel with the manner in which the individual scenes were directed, and throughout there are many indications of Bell's skill as a director, but the picture on the whole was a disappointment, due no doubt to the fact that there was not enough Bell in it.

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AND, TO CONCLUDE—

▼▼ THE NATIONAL Council on Freedom From Censorship writes me a letter asking if it could count on my interest and support. I find on the board of directors names of some friends of mine. For instance, Bob Sherwood is one of them, as are also Rupert Hughes, H. L. Mencken and my very good friend Stewart Edward White. And still the council can't count on my interest and support. I am not against censorship in the abstract any more than I am for it in the abstract.

And I will not become identified with any organization which opposes all censorship simply because it is censorship. Until motion picture producers wake up to the fact that decency is the only marketable product that always will yield a profit, I think pictures should be censored. However, I will give the council this much of a break: I defy Bob Sherwood to point out in his part of the *Spectator* just why I should support this organization. In my part of the paper I'll discuss what he says.

▼▼ HERE IS something from John Drinkwater's biography of Carl Laemmle that I recommend to the close attention of those who control the production of motion pictures: "The impresarios of the entertainment world often flatter themselves that they have their fingers on what they call the pulse of public taste. The conceit has cost them an infinite loss of pence and, when they have had it, of self-respect. No man has ever done anything worth doing in the show business by setting himself to give the public what he supposes it to want; many have made some reputation and money by giving it something in which, according to their taste whatever it might be, they themselves believed."

▼▼ ONE THING that producers should get into their heads is that they can not blame directors for the many box-office failures that are being turned out. Motion pictures can not be made from the kind of scripts the directors are being handed now. Only talkies are possible, and the public wants motion pictures, not talkies. The best talkies being turned out now are the work of directors who always made box-office successes in the silent days. Their talkies are not box-office successes because they are being forced to turn out a brand of screen entertainment that outrages the fundamental laws of screen art.

▼▼ IN AN INTERVIEW in the *Film Daily* Carl Laemmle Jr. suggests, as a means of bolstering box-office business, that some of the former successful pictures should be revived. It would be interesting to experiment now with some of the outstanding silent pictures. My own opinion is that the public is about ready to accept silent pictures again. It would be cheaper to try it with an old one than to go to the expense of making a new one. I suppose that each of us can recall a dozen pleasant memories of the silent days that he would like to see again.

▼▼ THIS FROM the *Film Daily*: " 'Trying to shock the public has lost its value as a dramatic accessory,' says Al DeMond, associate producer. 'There has been so much frankness and revelation, particularly in books and newspapers, that the people are now almost shock-proof and are responding more to intrinsic merit.' " In other words, pictures should be decent, not because they shouldn't shock the public, but because they can't.

▼▼ WHILE MY car was parked the other day someone lifted from it an Ediphone cylinder crowded with dictation, whose ultimate destination was *Spectator* patrons. I don't mind so much the loss of a cylinder, but I hate to have the world deprived of the priceless literature that was recorded upon its waxed surface. And I can't remember what the stuff was about, although I have a distinct impression that it was good. I think it was a criticism of the manner in which producers make pictures.

▼▼ SEPARATED MY radio set from the aerial in the house which we left to take up our residence at the beach; set it up at the beach, got a strange station and waited for announcement. Had no aerial, and darned if the station wasn't KENR, Chicago. Most surprising. In case you're interested, the set is a General Electric Midget, a tidy, little contrivance that you can place in your car and make it work anywhere you can plug in on an electric light service.

▼▼ WHEN WE knock around together, Bob Sherwood and I have some stirring arguments. Not always about pictures. Frequently we go highbrow. For instance, on the United Artists lot we had an argument about the thing that Doug Fairbanks goes into after he's had his daily sun-bath. Bob argued that it was the smallest swimming pool in Hollywood. I maintained that it was the largest bath tub. Doug remained neutral.

▼▼ IT SURELY can't be true, but at all events the papers report that the RKO-Radio people have sent two scouts to Europe to see the latest plays and read the latest books. The RKO and Pathe' studios own enough stories now to keep them busy making pictures for the next ten years. They don't need people with spy-glasses roaming around Europe. They need people with brains roaming around their studios.

▼▼ SOME TIME I'm going to see a Fox Movietone newsreel that does not include a tiresome speech on some abstract subject in which the average picture audience is in no way interested. And when I see it, I'm going to astonish the audience by rising from my seat and giving three hearty cheers.

▼▼ A PAPER chides Metro because Lawrence Tibbett came here to make a picture and found that there was no story for him. This is unfair to Metro. It was only two years ago, when it signed the contract with him, that it knew it was going to make a Tibbett picture this summer. Give it time.

▼▼ I AM AFRAID to go to a theatre showing a Wheeler-Woolsey comedy. I wrote the story for one of their pictures, and I'm afraid I might find its mangled remains upon the screen.

▼▼ AMONG THE notable social affairs last week was a luncheon tendered by Mr. Samuel Goldwyn to all the people in pictures who can get along with him. Covers were laid for two.

▼▼ MR. P. G. WODEHOUSE did some work last week. Drs. Clifford Loos and Donald Ross, who are in attendance, state that Mr. Wodehouse has an excellent chance for recovery.

▼▼ IT IS REPORTED that Charlie Ray is returning to pictures. He is one of the finest actors who ever stood in front of a camera.

▼▼ IT SEEMS to me that it would be astonishingly easy for us to get along without Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr.

Hollywood's Lost Enthusiasm and Its Other Laments

By R. E. Sherwood

When I made my first pilgrimage to the movie Mecca, 'way back in the pioneer days of 1922, the cinema industry was admittedly in its infancy. It was wearing long curls and rompers and rolling its hoop across the face of civilization. It was a bright, precocious child, full of pranks and of hooey, and regarded as an unmitigated pest by its elders among the arts.

During the intervening years, the cinema has emerged from its protracted infancy and rushed headlong through its adolescence into a semblance of maturity.

One may reasonably argue that the change has been all for the better, that the screen has profited by the accession of age and experience. But the more I look about me, the more I hear of Hollywood's studied cynicisms, the more inclined I am to lament the loss of exuberant youth.

For with that youth went something that constituted Hollywood's greatest charm—namely, enthusiasm. The film folk may have thought and talked childish nonsense in the old days, but it was nonsense on a grand, magnificent, inspiring scale. It was Stupendous, Colossal, Lavish!

▼▼ The blight of Wall Street had not then descended upon the extravagant industry. Cecil B. deMille was staging orgies that *were* orgies, and there were no sour-visaged efficiency experts around to check up on the costs. "Shoot the works, boys and girls! Let the red ink flow freely! We may have to pay for this to-morrow, but to-morrow will never come!" Such were the popular cries in that happy era before Western Electric, the Chase National Bank, the R. C. A. and Dillon-Read had muscled in on the celluloid racket.

Every director, every star, announced confidentially to anyone who happened to ask that his or her next picture was going to be the Supreme Triumph of History—and believed it, what's more.

Bunk? Of course it was bunk. But it was gorgeous, exciting, stimulating!

And Now What?

▼▼ Whenever you ask one of Hollywood's bored denizens how the new picture is shaping up, he replies, "Oh—it's just another louse," or "We're hoping for an even bigger flop than we had last time."

Perhaps this is a lot more honest, and therefore more admirable, than the old way—but it certainly doesn't give us press correspondents much cheerful material to ship home to the pleasure-loving fans.

The main trouble is that Hollywood has been converted from a wild, hilarious, gold-drunk frontier town into a mere out-post of Broadway. It has sacrificed its innocence for a mess of pseudo-sophistication. It has learned to ask itself that deadliest of all questions, "What of it?" and it has discovered (as Broadway did) that there is absolutely no answer.

This development should be intensely gratifying to a critic who has devoted the best years of his life to the task of deflating the cinema's ego. But I find it otherwise. For Hollywood was much funnier, and much better copy, in the gaudy, deMillian days of its infancy.

Rebound

▼▼ The wise-acres tell me that *Rebound* is doing what they elegantly term a "nose-dive" in theatres throughout the country, and that its star, Miss Ina Claire, will probably bounce right back to the New York stage whence she came.

Probably they're right. I saw the picture during its unimpressive run at the Carthay Circle, and although I enjoyed it immensely, I could imagine that it might prove to lack the necessary punch (whatever that may be.) It was too consistently intelligent in writing, direction and acting to be widely popular.

But as for Miss Claire! If she isn't the *comedienne supreme*, then I don't know even that much French. Her performance is one of infinite, exquisite grace. She strikes at each point with unerring sureness, and never with an excess of vehemence. She is dexterous and restrained in her development of the emotional overtones. To sum up: Miss Claire is elegant, even though she does wear singularly unbecoming clothes.

▼▼ If Ina Claire should fade from the screen, there would be no excuse for her admirers to complain that she has been misused. She has, in fact, been given the best of the breaks. *The Royal Family of Broadway* and *Rebound* yielded her two glorious parts and plenty of expert co-operation, and only an appalling incapacity for appreciation in the public could account for failure in either case.

With Tallulah Bankhead, however, it is different. This remarkably interesting actress has yet to be afforded the opportunity that she deserves. Her *Tarnished Lady* was a sad attempt to capture on the screen the heavy essence of Park Avenue. It was a story that, for some reason, was beaten before it started.

What the heavy-lidded Miss Bankhead needs is something vibrantly alive, gay, sparkling—something with the quality of Noel Coward's *Fallen Angels* or *Private Lives*. (Do I hear Mr. Lasky asking, "What for instance?" If so, I choose to ignore the interruption.) Her new picture is called, I believe, *My Sin*, which sounds none too promising.

Nausea Note

▼▼ California is a notoriously healthy state, and I know that I should be in the best of physical trim out here were it not for various things about the place which tend to make me sick.

I am alluding particularly to the trade names on signboards all over the lot. Whenever I see an announcement of

Enna Jettick Shoes, I have to think hard about other matters in order to ward off nausea. Nor do I feel any too well about that brand of milk which is recommended for *Adohr-able Babies*.

On Santa Monica Boulevard is the little champion of them all. It is a woman's dress emporium, and it is called *Ye Smack'y Shoppe*.

Now really, Mr. Beaton, just what does this mean? Why the apostrophe?

Some day, I'm going to borrow Neely Vanderbilt's gat, and after I have duly loaded it, I shall enter *Ye Smack'y Shoppe* and demand an explanation. And if they can't tell me how they ever happened on such a name, or even if they can tell me, I shall see red and start shooting.

It is just this sort of thing that arouses the killer instinct in the timidest men.

Grim Warning

▼▼ In the Last Issue of the *Hollywood Spectator* was quoted a statement by David Sarnoff, the radio tycoon (cf. *Time*, any issue). Everyone in the motion picture industry, and by that I mean everyone, should pay the strictest heed to what Mr. Sarnoff has had to say on the subject of television.

It is the handwriting on the wall—the grim warning that another mighty empire is about to arise from the ashes.

Astonishingly few people have the faintest notion of what television will mean. It is generally regarded with apathy as another gadget on the radio which will enable us to see the droll muggings of Amos and Andy, the simpering smiles of Uncle Wiggly (who tells the bed-time stories) and the sour visage of Simeon Fess as he sounds the key-note at the next Republican convention. Beyond that unalluring conception the average imagination declines to go.

The main facts about television, which are generally ignored, are these:

It will convert millions of sitting rooms into motion picture theatres, and all the broadcasting studios into projection booths.

It will bring the latest feature pictures to the public by courtesy of the same benevolent advertisers who now clutter up the free air with selling talk.

As Bugs Baer has said, we will have covered wagons in the dining room, big parades in the bedroom and strangers may kiss on the back porch.

Television will cause the closing of a staggering number of motion picture theatres, and thus necessitate the demobilization of thousands upon thousands of exquisitely trained ushers.

It will complete the process that was started when the Radio Corporation of America first invaded Hollywood: the reduction of the once-potent film industry to the humble estate of a subsidiary.

So I earnestly advise one and all in Hollywood to grab while the grabbing is good. In a year or so from now, the gravy is going to be a whole lot thinner.

▼▼ While Discussing Television, I have heard picture people say: "They won't be able to get pictures for broadcasting over the air on their advertising programs, because we won't sell."

Such optimists are due to learn that they'll have to sell or starve. The magnates behind the Radio Corporation didn't buy F.B.O., Pathé and Keith Orpheum for the purpose of adding their capital and power to an entertainment medium which was ostensibly in competition with their own. They embarked upon the manufacture of motion pictures because they knew that eventually they'd need them in their business.

▼▼ The Phrase, "The urge to congregate," is frequently used by those who underestimate the menace of television. They say that no matter how luscious the entertainment provided in homes, people will still want to escape from the hearth-side and join the mobs in theatres.

Perhaps this "urge to congregate" is still strong in the rural districts, where loneliness prevails. But it is a thing of the past in the congested cities, where people are so oppressed by mobs during the working hours that, when evening comes, they seek relief for their bruised shoulders. They like company, to be sure, but they don't want it at the expense of breathing space.

Certainly, the famous "urge to congregate" is not now powerful enough to drive crowds into film theatres where poor pictures are being shown, nor into churches where dull sermons are being given.

If a new production like *Cimarron* were being broadcast, and paid for by the manufacturers of Lucky Strikes or Listerine, so that the fans could see it without trouble or expense, do you suppose that the "urge to congregate" would compel them to ignore it and spend their evening by preference at a theatre where *The Vice Squad* might be on view?

▼▼ Of Course, no one who is outside the innermost shrines of radio can tell just how soon television will become an accomplished commercial fact. But my guess is that it won't be long.

For years, the big electrical barons have been soft-pedalling this subject, for they believed that the sale of radio sets would fall off terrifically if the public got the idea that television is imminent; shrewd citizens would not care to buy devices which were bound to become obsolete within a short time.

That condition, however, has changed—due to the fact that the sale of radio sets has fallen off anyway. The broadcasters have to produce a startling novelty to revive their depleted trade—and television is it.

Now that gentlemen of the importance of Mr. Sarnoff are beginning to admit it, you can watch for the appearance of huge displays in the back pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

▼▼ When Millions of television sets are in operation in homes throughout the land, the movie industry will undergo a reorganization as complete as Russia's.

Those producers who are smart enough will make fat sums of money out of the new order, for national advertisers will pay heavily for good films just as they now pay heavily for such attractions as Will Rogers, Maurice Chevalier and Floyd Gibbons.

The theatre owners, however, are going to find themselves with tons of useless concrete, marble and red brocade on their hands. The day of the gaudy film palace is about to end.

On the other hand, theatres which present flesh and blood entertainment will begin to fill up again. The public will be glutted with talking shadows on screens in the home, and whenever the urge to congregate does exert itself, they will want to go someplace where they can see and hear the real thing, rather than mechanical counterfeits of the real thing.

▼▼ I Made the Same Remarks about television in an article in *Scribner's Magazine* over two years ago. They were then greeted with jeers, and there will probably be a few more hoots even now. The big boys of the movie business never have been able to look beyond their own noses; and although (in most cases) that does permit them a fairly long range, it causes them to develop an astigmatism which is liable to prove fatal.

(Continued on Page 21)

Producers and Dumb Audiences

By Dalton Trumbo

So far as I am able to discern, the greatest curse of show people is their contempt for audience intelligence. Aided by those indefatigable fellows, the psychologists and statisticians, they have reached the conclusion that the public is dumb. They freely quote audience mental ages as varying from eight to twelve years. And they scream with anguish when acts and pictures designed to delight such adolescent minds fail to produce at the box-office.

It would be a poor showman indeed who would address his audience in terms such as, "The management realizes that the ensuing performance is very highbrow. It is because you stand in need of cultural elevation that we produce it." Yet an organization that would shun such announcements does not hesitate to produce entertainment which fairly shouts, "You are a bunch of dumb bunnies, and although God knows the stuff we are showing you is lousy enough, it is the only thing you are mentally able to appreciate."

▼▼ Just where the rumor of audience dumbness originated, or how it luxuriated to its present marvelous state, is beyond the range of a modest observer. With rare and therefore outstanding exceptions, great art has been popular art. Particularly in our present day is the judgment of critical minds sustained by popular choice. The financial and artistic successes of a Shaw, a Merejkowski, an Elie Faure, a Hauptman, an Undset, and in our Babbitish America of such persons as Dreiser, Cabell, Lewis, Frost, Millay, Hemingway, Nathan, Mencken—such successes demonstrate that more than anything else the public demands intelligence and originality. The financial and social standing of artists from Greece to the present day proves the fallacy of a current belief that nothing genuinely fine is appreciated. After they have entered their productive years artists usually have a delightful and easy existence—providing, of course, that they are really artists.

If the public is so dumb that it requires only pap and oatmeal for intellectual fare, how is it that *Seventh Heaven*, *All Quiet*, *The Millionaire*, *Skippy* and a dozen others have received such tremendous box-office approval? Among the finest artistic offerings of the screen in recent years, they are also its outstanding successes. And the public did not witness them because of critical praise. The public is fairly immune to critical opinion. It paid its money to the box-office at advanced prices because the pictures were fine, intelligent, and in some way or other approaching art. Art for art's sake is a decadent and horrible affair; but art for public entertainment—and all great art by its very nature is just that—will follow its ageless practice and make money.

Statistics—A Protest

▼▼ The pages of this magazine are possibly inappropriate for the piffling protest I am about to utter. If there were any other method by which I could relieve my feelings, I most certainly would employ it. But there are times in the life of every man—does that sound like a Theatre Guild play in the second act?—when he discovers that he must unburden himself, not to his mother or wife or sweetheart, but to the world in general. That is why a scribbler is such a lucky fellow. He can air his tastes and distastes, and be quite callous to the general nausea they arouse.

I am troubled profoundly by statistics. Wherever I go I am confronted with graphs, charts and facts. To be unable to give the diameter of a human hair or to call out the number of apes in Tennessee has come to be a major sin, symptomatic of incompetence and general inanity. People I knew and loved have become walking encyclopediae. They inform me that a kiss—God forbid such indiscretion!—shortens my life two and one-half minutes, that there are 684,958 eels in the Gulf of Mexico, that for every man who knows the meaning of a three club bid there are nine and seven-eighths men who will draw to an inside straight and be disappointed if they don't make.

▼▼ If I state with the reasonable conviction of an ignorant man that humans do not grow horns, I am confronted by the triumphant Mr. Ripley with a Mongolian who has not only nurtured a tusk fourteen inches long, but who has also used it to gore three critics and a gentleman. People whom I always thought quite ordinary amuse themselves of an evening by asking each other atrocious questions, and I have paid so little attention to the accumulation of facts that I face social ostracism. If I retire in desperation to the sanctity of my room, the newspapers leap at me with a daily series of questions, ghastly in content and idiotic in value, with the information that if I can't answer correctly at least seven I may as well take gas.

With all this a constantly increasing positiveness has taken possession of my compatriots and colleagues. The weirdest theories are quoted with solemn faith. On Hollywood Boulevard people mysteriously count the letters in their names, divide the sum by the day of the week, add the date of their birthday, and thereby discover whether or not they will get by the gateman in the morning. And they do it as seriously as an English scientist declaring that the universe is constantly creating itself, or an American scientist maintaining that it is in the midst of fatal degeneration.

▼▼ In this whirlpool of factual prolixity I am a lost and tortured soul. I retire at night blushing to think of what the psychologists at the Harvard Business School may have discovered about me during the course of the day, and I arise in the morning prepared not at all to be surprised if the graduate school of John Hopkins has isolated the human soul during my slumbers, nudged it familiarly, made it leap about like a ballet dancer and diagrammed its reflexes.

All of this, I grant, can not be termed statistics. But statistics is at the bottom of the whole matter. It is the germ from which the cult of facts is sprung, and when facts run rampant, imagination is likely to shrivel and die. Witness in Hollywood the success of the statisticians and compare it with the work being turned out as box-office sugar. The statistics are perfect, but the pictures—ah, my friends. . . .

For three days running I have noticed an old man leaning against the building not far from the *Spectator* offices. He is a horrid fellow with an expression of asthmatic melancholy and a glance that is nasty and prying. He appears to be looking for something, and until this moment I have been unable to fathom the object of his search. Now I know. The man is compiling statistics!

Sweetness and Light

▼▼ Comes to my desk a righteous publication from London called *The Methodist Times*. It is as sweet as a faded rose, and as depressing. The movies, says this journal of uplift, are in a terrible mess, in consequence of which the establishment of vigilance committees is urged, in order that the good people of the empire may be saved for Wesley. On page two of the publication under the snappy and alliterative title of *Sin and the Cinema*, a wild-eyed reverend, whose name is Dr. Percy Dearmer, gives us his views on the situation. The amazing nobility of his ideas and the Christian love expressed in them are worthy of reprint.

"Such humanity as these films depict," says the reverend gentleman, "would not be worth saving, could have no future, might as well be destroyed as the failure of Creation, the only quite ignoble thing alive on the earth." There is a great deal more by this holy fellow, and he concludes with a horrified account of the rebuff of a deputation seeking stricter censorship at the hands of Home Secretary Clynes. The latter gentleman stated that he considered it the duty of parents, not the state, to guide the cinema attendance of their children. So disgusting an attitude throws the Reverend Dr. Dearmer into a fit and provides excellent reading.

Salvation in Sheffield

▼▼ Those who consider that the United States is in a horrible condition at the hands of uplifters and reformers, should find comfort in the case of British censorship, recently brought to a head at a meeting of the redoubtable Sheffield city council. Warner Brothers' *Outward Bound* was banned by the British Board of Film Censorship because the picture deals with the after-life. The censors over there feel that only those churches known to possess architecturally perfect diagrams of heaven should be permitted to deal in such shadowy matters.

But when the film was billed in the noble city of Sheffield the local government displayed alarming tendencies to allow the picture to show. Whereupon Alderman Frank Thraves, chairman of the local Watch Society, precipitated a fight, and although *To-day's Cinema* gives a serious recital of this epic of the censors, I found it quite funny.

▼▼ Councillor H. Morris moved that the picture be shown. His chief reason was that the neighboring town of Barnsley had shown the film, and had billed it as "the film banned in Sheffield." Mr. Morris intimated that this action placed Sheffield in a decidedly sniffish position, and he didn't like it a bit. He also commented sourly on "Yankee rubbish."

Councillor Mrs. Longden said that she hated awfully to go against the B. B. F. C., and Alderman A. Barton, in heated opposition, declared that people should be free to view whatever films they wished. This novel idea Alderman J. G. Graves found quite loathsome. He stirred his audience with accounts of sex pictures, and emphasized that these passion-teasers were exhibited to people who sat "in the dark" while viewing them.

▼▼ Alderman E. G. Rowlinson wished to heaven that the government would take over such nasty business bag and baggage, and leave the Sheffield City Council to consider more serious matters. As things were becoming really hot Alderman A. Smith came forth with a bomb shell. The city council, thought Alderman Smith, could hardly ban a film which it had not seen. After a few ticklish questions Mr. Thraves of the Watch Society manfully admitted that he was among those who had not witnessed the production he sought to ban. In the end *Outward Bound* was given a clean bill. Thus was a great crisis met in the ancient town of Sheffield, and thus was civic righteousness vindicated.

Pictures at U. S. C.

▼▼ From the University of Southern California comes the announcement that a course in the making of motion pictures is now under way at the Metropolitan College under the direction of Dr. Boris V. Morkovin, who is a member of the advisory council of the National Committee for the Study of Social Values in Motion Pictures.

Some two years ago the University announced its courses in screen writing, acting, and cinematography. Since that time it appears that the project has languished, although The Academy is presumed to have it under a protective wing. I have browsed around the University from time to time, and during the last year have made several efforts to obtain an announcement of the course. At its inception a rather complete catalogue was issued, but it is now out of print, and no others have been supplied.

I think that many students who were attracted by the glowing possibilities of a course sponsored by The Academy are due for a sorry time of it. One can inquire at the registrar's office, from practically any faculty member and among the students without result. No one knows anything about it. The Bureau of Appointments, so far as I know, has only the slenderest contact with studios, and the whole project seems disorganized and nebulous.

About My Dog

▼▼ Mr. Beaton has given me permission amounting almost to a command to disagree with him whenever I feel that I have good cause. I rarely will have an opportunity to contradict him with such finality as at present. In a previous issue of the *Spectator* he mentions my Airedale pup and his desire to make its acquaintance. It is no Airedale at all, and although it weighs only nine pounds, it is not a pup. My dog is a toy Boston bull.

I tried to straighten out the matter with Mr. Beaton at the time we were discussing dogs, but he was somewhat perturbed because I sat on a tiny yellow kitten that had curled up on the most comfortable chair in his library. Under these distressing circumstances I can understand that his slip on the breed of my pup is not without excuse. Nor must this

mild correction be taken as a slap at Airedales. I think they are very nice dogs. They are, of course, large, boisterous and flea fanciers *par excellence*. They have not, I think, a Boston's aristocratic outlook upon life. Most Airedales are rather ragamuffin fellows with sorrowful eyes and a hankering for garbage cans. But I like them, and upon thinking it over, I may buy one, not only as company for the Boston, but also to sustain Mr. Beaton's reputation for veracity.

We Take a Walk

▼▼ IT WAS ONE of those immoderately hot afternoons we have been having lately. Acting upon an impulse we left the car and took a short walk through winding streets. The streets followed the course of the least resistance among the foothills, and were lined with fences, flowers and unpainted shacks. Mexican children—hundreds of them, I think—swarmed in the sunshine, and each one had a dog. They watched us—the children and the dogs—with wide solemn eyes. The principal street lay through a little valley, and we could look toward the surrounding hills and see back-yard fences in a state of crazy disrepair making zig-zag diagrams on the slopes. A goat tethered to a gatepost was butting an inquisitive dog. Some of the roofs were repaired with beaten tin cans that caught the sunlight in golden stains. An air of genial disenchantment hung over the street.

"People live in places like this because they don't know any better," said my companion. He glanced at me and then looked at the scene before him. An expression of doubt played about his eyes. "Or perhaps because they know too much," he added softly. The children and dogs stared at us and the sun scorched us and for a moment or two we both felt a little foolish.

Trumbo Reviews

▼▼ THE SOLE obligation imposed upon me by Mr. Beaton at the time we discussed motion picture reviews was that I speak truthfully, and to the best of my ability, logically. Aside from this agreeable condition I am unrestrained. In my reports I shall have no thought, even though I were able to accomplish the task, of saving the industry, or of reforming it. My opinions shall be merely those of a middling intelligent person who probably represents a number of millions of middling intelligent persons with box-office money in their pockets.

Heretofore I have discriminated in my theatre attendance, seeing only such pictures as were recommended by responsible reviewers and friends whose judgment I respected. Thus I have seen the better showings. From this time forward I shall view the mill run product. If I find it fairly poor—as I frankly anticipate—it will be only because the mill run of everything from novels and plays to smoking tobacco is generally poor.

I take over the work with the strong conviction that the motion picture is an art distinct from all other arts, and inferior in potentialities to none of them. Moreover, I believe that good art is good business, and have gathered enough material on the matter to substantiate the conclusion to my own satisfaction. I have prejudices, and despite my precautions they will occasionally slip into view. For them I can only ask to be pardoned. It is natural that I should desire to make friends for the *Spectator*, and incidentally for myself, and only decent that I should hope to make them without resorting to any type of critical prostitution.

Very Tame

▼▼ *LAUGHING SINNERS* is Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's idea of regeneration, with a dash of sin, a pinch of entertainment, and an abundance of improbable situations. We are asked to believe that Joan Crawford, a cabaret girl, after sleeping two years with her traveling salesman sweetheart, Neil Hamilton, really believes that the gentleman is going to marry her. After he has shied from the altar and profitably married someone else, we are forced to witness Miss Crawford's spiritual seduction at the hands of Clark Gable, a Salvation Army worker, and eventually her complete redemption in the midst of children and sunshine, her talented limbs swathed in the dark skirts of a street singing tambourine shaker.

Holding no grudge for the Army, still I question the feasibility of bringing it or any other existing organization onto the screen. There is always an odor of propaganda about such a proceeding, and in *Laughing Sinners* there is also a sermon or two. The picture will add nothing to the reputations of Miss Crawford and Neil Hamilton. It may even hurt them.

▼▼ CLARK GABLE, whom I remember with pleasure for his work in *The Secret Six*, is handicapped as the Salvation Army officer. Guy Kibbee furnishes the most enjoyable performance of the show, and Marjorie Rambeau is competent in her hard-boiled role. The dialogue is as smooth, as obviously timed and as torrential as a phonograph disc. The

As we climb the hill of prosperity may we never meet an old friend coming down.

GEORGE SIDNEY

actors seemed to rush through their lines to hold the picture within a decent footage.

Harry Beaumont directs capably enough and with thorough realism. I have roamed about such drab hotels as Cedric Gibbons gives us. I have listened to wise cracks in the lobby, gazed a little squeamishly at the horrible furniture, and descended into the cemented basements where knights of the road display their wares on bare board shelves. The stuff is authentic and thoroughly unattractive.

Sparkling

▼▼ *INDISCREET* marks the arrival of Gloria Swanson in a role which is admirably suited to her capabilities. The opus by De Sylva, Brown and Henderson and Leo McCarey is deft, light and utterly without serious intent. Those three intolerable insults rampant on the screen at present—moony philosophy, obscene remarks and idiotic comedy—are completely absent.

A smooth cast smoothly directed by Leo McCarey surrounds the star. Monroe Owsley is sufficiently snaky in his mildly villainous role of faithless sweetheart to Miss Swanson and later to her sister, Barbara Kent. Parenthetically Miss Kent is charming and almost steals a few scenes for herself. Ben Lyon as the impulsive and broad-minded novelist furnishes a lot of comedy with Gloria and ends by marrying her. Arthur Lake is the excessively juvenile suitor for Barbara Kent's hand, and in my heart of hearts I do not blame the lady for almost ditching him in favor of Owsley. The boy is too calfish even for comedy. Young men of his age drink their liquor straight and murmur adolescent sophistries anent love, women and Havelock Ellis, instead of writhing in perpetual self-consciousness.

An unostentatiously effective musical score added to the picture. I must confess, to the credit of Al Newman, that I was not conscious of the exact moments it began and left off. *Come to Me*, the charming little song which the picture introduces, is used as an integral part of the plot, and instead of being superfluous becomes almost essential. It is a perfect bit for Miss Swanson's colorful voice. This United Artists production is a clever, sprightly affair which succeeds beautifully in its object of being entertaining over nothing at all.

Low Down and Dull

▼▼ *GOLD-DUST GERTIE* brings us Winnie Lightner and those two horrible clowns, Olsen and Johnson, in a photographed burlesque of the vintage of 1905. This melancholy affair, posing as comedy and directed by Lloyd Bacon, has only the excellent work of Claude Gillingwater to save it from being horrible beyond endurance.

In view of the recent clamor among writers for screen credits, it might be appropriate to mention that the screen play is by William K. Wells and Ray Enright, and that the dialogue comes from Arthur Caesar. Vulgarity runs rampant. Nothing is left to the imagination. Senseless dirt is heaped all over the place in an effort to save the picture, and the whole show ends on the brink of the latrine.

▼▼ WINNIE LIGHTNER, having married, divorced and collected alimony from Olsen, Johnson and George Byron, captures Gillingwater as a fourth husband. The latter is still chartering yachts, although he manufactures bathing suits which do not expose the feminine form. But that is merely an incidental discrepancy. Mr. Olsen and Mr. Johnson, following their legitimate experience, point for laughs, and when they do not get them—as frequently they do not—the silent period designed to let the laugh die away is as gruesome as a morgue.

Instead of being amused at the picture I was embarrassed. Not for myself, but for Winnie Lightner, who should go back to the stage. And for Olsen and Johnson. And for the writers who adapted it. And for the poor director who was handed the thing and told to do his darndest. And for somebody out at Warner Brothers who recently sank four millions of his private fortune into the company in order to permit it to turn out more pictures like *Gold-Dust Gertie*.

Appealing

▼▼ *I TAKE THIS WOMAN*, based on the novel by Mary Roberts Rinehart, is by no means a masterpiece and does not pretend to be one. It is, I think, something more important than a masterpiece in these sad days. It is a good average film, the sort that will do a good average business and send the audiences home feeling mildly contented, which is to say that it contains pictorial emotion and action instead of audible philosophy, and that the dialogue is not only sensibly written, but also sensibly restrained.

Carole Lombard falls in love with the rancher, Gary Cooper, marries him, escapes from him, and quite naturally capitulates in the end, deserting wealth for a Wyoming ranch. Of course the thing is impossibly conceived, but it is pleasant stuff about which to meditate. If Miss Lombard had played her character to a realistic climax there would have been present all the current laudations to honeymoons in a Cadillac, bed-time prayers to six per cent interest, and cradle songs to a new fur coat.

▼▼ THE ADAPTATION by Vincent Lawrence and the direction by Marion Gering and Slavko Vorkapich are impressive.

There are almost completely silent scenes, and the quantity of dialogue is more limited than the usual run. It sounds amazingly as though the characters are really talking with each other, discussing problems, thinking as they speak. Amazing, I say, because we are accustomed to facile, tempestuous, glib speeches on the screen—and speeches is the only word to describe them. The usual harsh assault on the ears is completely absent.

Helen Ware, Charles Trowbridge and Lester Vail are eminently satisfactory as relatives and fiancé of Miss Lombard, and Paramount may compliment itself for having produced a genuine and entertaining picture.

Also a Smart Picture

▼▼ *SMART MONEY* will doubtless throw Warner Brothers into ecstasies of joy because it forces a reluctant apology for the nasty remarks made about *Gold-Dust Gertie.* A duckling and a swan from the same setting may seem a little unreasonable, but both pictures were hatched at the Burbank lot.

Here is an entertaining picture, remarkable if for nothing else because it deals with the underworld without firing a single gun. There are no tough mugs slouching around darkened corners. Almost there is a killing at a poker game, but it is nicely avoided, and the accidental death of James Cagney in the final sequence adds a genuine touch of tragedy to a story which has plenty of comedy, enough suspense and a splendid plot.

▼▼ Edward G. Robinson captures the sympathy of the audience as a small-town gambler in the city, and I wished him more success in his shady ventures than I did Clark Gable in his conversion of Joan Crawford in *Laughing Sinners.* Which may prove that I have a mind with criminal tendencies, or that Robinson's part was more adapted to audience sympathy. At any rate a picture dealing with crooked gamblers and their scorn of the district attorney left me with a more pleasant feeling than a story of religious reform.

The picture, as an underworld story, comes a little late in the day. The underworld theme is passing, but if *Smart Money* had been produced six months ago it would have attracted considerably more attention than it will in the present fade-out of film gangland. Alfred E. Green directed, and Robinson and James Cagney were the rest of the show. Evalyn Knapp, Ralf Harolde and Noel Francis furnished the support.

Another Play

▼▼ *TOO YOUNG TO MARRY.* The title of Martin Flavin's play, *Broken Dishes,* evidently didn't have enough sex appeal for First National, so it was changed and now bears no relation to the picture. This is an old Hollywood trick, and one of the reasons, I suppose, for so many smashing box-office hits. And another trick just as old is cheating an old, experienced actor such as O. P. Heggie out of the star billing he deserves, and handing the publicity to the lovers. Grant Withers and Loretta Young have very minor parts, and the show belongs entirely to Heggie, Emma Dunn and Richard Tucker. Mr. Withers is unimpressive, and Miss Young contents herself with being beautiful, which is about all the part allows. She does this expertly. It is a matter of comment, I think, that however clever they may be, the newer crop of leading ladies have few beauties among them.

It has become my custom in the past few weeks to look first among the credits for the play from which the picture is adapted. They are all plays, and unfortunately plays are

a great deal like pictures—they are not all good. But Martin Flavin's, which was showing legitimately at the Pasadena Playhouse during the local run of the picture, is a refreshing and excellent affair, with considerable tragedy packed into its homely and often funny lines. Francis Edwards Faragoh does the screen adaptation of this story of a frustrated woman and her intimidation of a gentle husband.

▼▼ HOWEVER MUCH I enjoyed it—and I really did—it was impossible to forget for one moment that it was a play. The sequence wherein O. P. Heggie, longing to attend a lodge meeting, walks through the house hesitating frequently as he considers his problem, could have been much more effective if he had not given voice to his thought at each halt. People simply don't talk to themselves as much as pictures would have us believe. Heggie would have had a chance at some excellent pantomime, and therefore at the highest form of dramatic art, if fewer words had issued from his lips.

Mervin LeRoy directs and manages to give a completely honest interpretation of the small town and small lives of the characters. The settings are genuine, even to the old-fashioned bath-room. *Too Young to Marry* is an enjoyable picture. The pity is that it misses so many chances to be better.

Freshman Betrayed!

▼▼ *CONFESSIONS OF A CO-ED* is better than its title, and its profundity is such that one doesn't have to think too hard while viewing it. Sometime ago I swore an oath never to attend a picture in the title of which were contained the words confession, sin, flesh or lady. That was before I became a reviewer.

The characters of this picture, founded upon the diary of an anonymous sorority girl—awful thought—display the reactions of normal human animals, which is something unusual for the collegiates. There are no persecuted freshmen, football games or rallies. The sets are a little to elaborate for realism, and the girls too pretty. The handsomest girls do not reach college. Matrimony, the stage and the five-and-ten snaps them up rather early. But these are really minor objections.

▼▼ SEX HAS invaded college, and although it leaves the innocent freshman girl *enceinte*, it at least presents her as an intelligent creature. The problem is delicately handled and I welcome it. The sex theme in college pictures may be defended upon three propositions: (1) it is the principal consideration of all co-eds and eddies, (2) it is immensely preferable to the miasmatic imbecilities which previously have been paraded through campus productions, and (3) in this particular instance it is handled without necking parties, booze celebrations or dirty jokes.

Sylvia Sidney is charming in the principal role, but with her name she could not be otherwise. It has been dealt with in prose, poetry and ballad for so long that its very syllables connote loveliness. Phillips Holmes playing opposite Miss Sidney handles a difficult part. He does some rather nasty things to the little girl, and it requires skill for him to retain the audience sympathy. Norman Foster and Claudia Dell are satisfactory and the direction by Dudley Murphy and David Burton keeps the picture flowing smoothly.

Sophisticated Love

▼▼ *REBOUND.* When an intelligently done picture such as this one leaves a moderately sophisticated audience as lukewarm as Miss Claire's starring vehicle, one only can conclude that it wasn't a picture at all. I listened rather closely for audience comment, and not once did I hear the word "picture" mentioned. There was much buzzing about plays, playwrights and clever lines. That and nothing more.

Despite the brilliant work of Miss Claire and the outstandingly fine performance of Robert Williams, credit for *Rebound* whether good, bad or indifferent, belongs chiefly to Donald Ogden Stewart, who wrote the play, and to Horace Jackson, who arranged the adaptation. Under the hand of Edward H. Griffith the story unfolds smoothly, and with such finished performers as Robert Ames and Hedda Hopper, supported by Myrna Loy, Hale Hamilton, Walter Walker and Leigh Allen, a dull evening is out of the question.

▼▼ IT IS ONE of those ultra modern affairs calculated to enrage persons who take their social reformation seriously. It deals with gay people who drink cocktails, go to Paris and devote their spare time to the acquisition of poise, nonchalance and moderately clever speech. A girl marries for love, finds herself losing her husband, and wins him back intelligently and not too dramatically. Thus the cleverly unimportant story.

The picture sparkles with wit of a sort that is comparatively rare. The photography is beautiful. As talkies run, it may be a great picture, for it has both finish and intelligence to recommend it. Viewing it as a play, I enjoyed it immensely. But even though the George Jean Nathans bellow from now until the end of time (which they will), it is a fairly safe bet that it would have required three times the directorial brains and acting ability to have made *Rebound* as a motion picture.

Not a Gigolo

▼▼ *JUST A GIGOLO* is a rather dubious comedy which will please William Haines' admirers because he turns out to be an English peer, and no gigolo at all. Surprise! Surprise! And he wins a lovely bride in the person of Irene Purcell. And I went home too happy for words at the goodness of life and the excellent fortune of the two idle aristocrats who finally discovered the potency of Cupid.

The story is founded upon the rather flimsy moral expedient of a gentleman in masquerade who tries to seduce the girl he is to marry in order to determine the extent of her virtue. Granting that this is the thing to do, Haines does it rather well. There are many improbable situations, and for one I found the thing somewhat a strain upon my credulity. Miss Purcell was a delight, although her anger was a trifle too snappy to be convincing. And I suggest also that Bill Haines is a little ridiculous when sweet and sugared lines are put into his mouth.

▼▼ THE WRITING STAFF for *Gigolo* reads like a list of those present at a Notre Dame football titanic. First come Alex-

ander Engel and Alfred Grunwald, who wrote the play *Dancing Partner*. Next in line are Frederic Hatton and Fanny Hatton, who obligingly put the thing in English. The rear guard is composed of Hans Kraly, Richard Schayer and Claudine West, who adapted it to the screen and revamped the dialogue. With such a battery of literateurs one might expect something better. Jack Conway directed, and C. Aubrey Smith did the typical British lord rather well. Charlotte Granville was the conventional old lady gone slightly modern. M-G-M should really do something about such affairs.

Royal Bust

▼▼ *COMMAND PERFORMANCE* has everything that has gone into pictures of royalty for the last twenty years. Someone who is fairly well posted tells me that the backers of Tiffany are losing much cash each year, and if there are many more such tawdry affairs as *Command Performance*, their red ink bill is going to mount higher.

The show might have been saved if Producer Samuel Zierler and Director Walter Lang, together with James Cruze, had looked over the script with an eye to plausibility. It is, of course, another adapted play, the original having been written by C. Stafford Dickens. It is over-acted and over-serious. It might have made good slapstick, or with cleverer lines, fair satire. But as a drama it is exceedingly flat.

▼▼ NEIL HAMILTON plays the dual role of a prince and a young actor who, enmeshed in political intrigue, is forced to woo Princess Una Merkel in order that the glorious nation of Serblandt may be saved from war. I think Hamilton plays the part as well as could be expected, but the ancient devices of the court play hamper his style. Miss Merkel was a disappointment. I haven't seen her other pictures, but I have noticed considerable favorable comment on her ability. Perhaps I should reserve judgment in view of the sorry nature of her vehicle. Her voice is much too adolescent in *Command Performance* and the air of innocence which she exudes is a bit alarming. Also I wish the photographers would watch her close-ups in the future.

I hope that so long as I live I never again witness the intrigues of two mythical kingdoms. But if someone should come along with a story set in the courts of Berlin or Vienna preceding or during the war, and if the historical figures should be authentically presented along with the fictional, I think I would swoon for joy. In other words, I want something that I can believe, particularly if it is to be treated as seriously as *Command Performance*.

Inconsistency

▼▼ AS *I* GLANCE back over these reviews, I am impressed by the fact that I am not quite consistent. For example I speak more favorably of *I Take This Woman*, *Smart Money* and *Indiscreet* than of *Rebound*. And *Confessions of a Co-Ed*, while better than *I Take This Woman*, is not spoken of as highly as the latter.

But I have acquired a habit of accepting the viewpoint of a creator before passing judgment on his creation. I can not criticize a watermelon because it is not a cantaloupe, however much I may adore cantaloupes. I must judge watermelon as watermelon. If a picture is pretentious and assumes to deal seriously with any given topic, I attend it in the expectation of seeing its pretentiousness vindicated and its seriousness sincere. If it achieves only an ordinary success, I am inclined to be less generous with it than with a picture that claims only to be an ordinary hour and a half of average entertainment.

If I were to fall into the fatal error of comparison, I would probably start my rating something like this: *Rebound*, *Indiscreet*, *Smart Money*, and so on down the line. But this I can not do for the present. I shall accept ordinary performances and comment upon them as ordinary performances, expecting nothing unusual from them. But when a super-super-super comes along, I shall expect to be super-thrilled, and will be disappointed if I am not. As a novice, utterly unfamiliar with the making of pictures, I may be wrong in my attitude, but at least I shall be sincere.

▼ ▼ ▼

Hollywood's Lost Enthusiasm

(Continued from Page 14)

They can't laugh off this new device for making home-life more horrible. When it gets going, as get going it will, it is certain to add immeasurably to the hysterical bewilderment of this delighful machine age.

The Eternal Heavy

▼▼ AS A NAIVE tourist through Hollywood and environs, I always keep my eyes open for glimpses of the stars. (By the way—I have not yet seen Garbo, and have just about abandoned hope.)

One mighty thrill has been vouchsafed me. While dining at the Ambassador, I was permitted to watch Erich von Stroheim in the act of making an entrance. The sight of this ominous, straight-spined Teuton, swinging a stout walking stick as he strode to his table, reminded me that Hollywood is actually a fountain-head of romance and glamor.

Von Stroheim has presumably been discredited, rejected, beaten; but he doesn't seem to have lost one atom of the magnificent egotism which has created masterpieces on the screen.

I don't know just why it is that he always carries a heavy cane. Perhaps it's on the chance that he might encounter Louis B. Mayer.

Success Story

▼▼ ALSO IN THE last issue of the *Hollywood Spectator* was an article on the subject of Lois Moran, in which it was complained that this lovely and able actress was not receiving the recognition that she deserved in Hollywood.

Shortly before the publication of that issue, Miss Moran's contract with Fox was terminated and she was about to return to the New York stage. But the day after the *Spectator* appeared, with its eloquent protest, M-G-M sent for Miss Moran and engaged her to play the lead with John Gilbert in *West of Broadway*.

Which just goes to prove the truth of a statement that has been made in these columns on previous occasions:

The shortest and surest road to fame and fortune is through an advertisement in the *Hollywood Spectator!*

If you can't pay for the space with money, send around a few ears of green corn, some old copies of the *National Geographic Magazine*, or even your last year's Rolls-Royce.

▼ ▼ ▼

Coming 'Round

(Kann in M. P. Daily)

Pantomime will always have its appeal and is as distinct a dramatic force as dialogue can be and is when properly written and treated.

Reviewed In This Number

COMMAND PERFORMANCE—

A James Cruze production. Directed by Walter Lang; from the play by Maude Fulton and Gordon Rigby; photographed by Charles Schoenbaum; recording engineers, W. Smith and Frederick Lau; film editor, R. E. Loewinger; produced by Samuel Zierler.

The cast: Neil Hamilton, Una Merkel, Helen Ware, Albert Gran, Lawrence Grant, Thelma Todd, Vera Lewis, Mischa Auer, Burr McIntosh, William von Brincken, Richard Carlyle, Murdock MacQuarrie.

CONFESSIONS OF A CO-ED—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Dudley Murphy and David Burton; photographed by Lee Garmes; recording engineer, H. M. Lindgren.

The cast: Phillips Holmes, Sylvia Sidney, Norman Foster, Claudia Dell, Florence Britton, Martha Sleeper, Dorothy Libarre, Marguerite Warner.

GOLD-DUST GERTIE—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Lloyd Bacon; screen play by William K. Wells and Ray Enright; dialogue by Arthur Caesar; photographed by James Van Trees; film editor, Harold McLernon.

The cast: Winnie Lightner, Olsen and Johnson, Dorothy Christy, Claude Gillingwater, Arthur Hoyt, George Byron, Vivienne Oakland, Charles Grapewin, Charles Judels, Virginia Sale.

I TAKE THIS WOMAN—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Marion Gering; associate director, Slavko Vorkapich; from the novel, *Lost Ecstasy*, by Mary Roberts Rinehart; adaptation by Vincent Lawrence; photographed by Victor Milner.

The cast: Gary Cooper, Carole Lombard, Helen Ware, Lester Vail, Charles Trowbridge, Clara Blandick, Gerald Fielding, Albert Hart, Guy Oliver, Syd Saylor, Mildred Van Dorn, Leslie Palmer, Ara Haswell, Frank Darien, David Landau.

INDISCREET—

A United Artists' picture. A DeSylva, Brown and Henderson production; directed by Leo McCarey; story by DeSylva, Brown and Henderson and Leo McCarey; photographers, Ray June and Gregg Toland; recording engineer, Oscar Lagerstrom; art director, Richard Day; musical director, Al Newman; assistant director, Harry Scott; production manager, James Dent; costumes by René Hubert; film director, Hal C. Kern.

The cast: Gloria Swanson, Ben Lyon, Monroe Owsley, Barbara Kent, Arthur Lake, Maude Eburne, Henry Kolker, Nella Walker.

JUST A GIGOLO—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Jack Conway; from the play, *Dancing Partner*, by Aexander Engel and Alfred Grunwald; English adaptation by Frederic Hatton and Fanny Hatton; screen adaptation and dialogue by Hans Kraly, Richard Schayer and Claudine West; photographed by Oliver T. Marsh; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; wardrobe by René Hubert; film editor, Frank Sullivan.

The cast: William Haines, Irene Purcell, C. Aubrey Smith, Charlotte Granville, Lilian Bond, Albert Conti, Maria Alba, Ray Milland, Lenore Bushman, Gerald Fielding, Yola d'Avril.

LAUGHING SINNERS—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Harry Beaumont; adapted from the play, *Torch Song*, by Kenyon Nicholson; continuity by Bess Meredyth; additional dialogue by Edith Fitzgerald; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; gowns by Adrian; dances arranged by Mosconi; photographed by Charles Rosher; film editor, George Hively.

The cast: Joan Crawford, Neil Hamilton, Clark Gable, Marjorie Rambeau, Guy Kibbee, Cliff Edwards, Roscoe Karns, Gertrude Short, George Cooper, George F. Marion, Bert Woodruff.

REBOUND—

An RKO-Pathé picture; a Charles R. Rogers production. Directed by Edward H. Griffith; from the play by Donald Ogden Stewart; screen adaptation by Horace Jackson; photographed by Norbert Brodine; recording directors, D. A. Cutler and Harold Stine; assistant director, Paul Jones; art director, Carroll Clark; costumes by Gwen Wakeling; film editor, Dan Mandell.

The cast: Ina Claire, Robert Ames, Myrna Loy, Robert Williams, Hedda Hopper, Hale Hamilton, Walter Walker, Louise Closser Hale, Leigh Allen.

SMART MONEY—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Alfred E. Green; photographed by Robert Kurrle; art director, Robert Haas; film editor, Jack Killifer.

The cast: Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, Evalyn Knapp, Ralf Harolde, Noel Francis, Margaret Livingstone, Maurice Black, William House, Paul Porcasi, Gladys Lloyd, Polly Walters.

TARNISHED LADY—

A Paramount picture. Directed by George Cukor; adapted from an original story, *New York Lady*, by Donald Ogden Stewart; photographed by Larry Williams.

The cast: Tallulah Bankhead, Clive Brook, Phoebe Foster, Alexander Kirkland, Osgood Perkins, Elizabeth Patterson.

UP FOR MURDER—

A Universal picture. Directed by Monta Bell; original story by Monta Bell; dialogue by James Whitaker; photographed by Karl Freund; art director, Danny Hall.

The cast: Lew Ayres, Genevieve Tobin, Purnell B. Pratt, Kenneth Thomson, Freddie Burke Frederick, Betty Jane Graham, Aileen Manning, Frank McHugh, Louise Beavers, Frederick Burt.

WOMEN LOVE ONCE—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Edward Goodman; from the story by Zoë Akins; photographed by Karl Struss.

The cast: Paul Lukas, Eleanor Boardman, Juliette Compton, Geoffrey Kerr, Judith Wood, Marilyn Knowlden, Claude King, Mischa Auer, Paul Nicholson, Herman Bing, Florence Enright.

▼ ▼ ▼

Mickey vs. Jannings

(Cinematograph Times, England)

While the German censor banned a famous Mickey Mouse cartoon, because the cats were wearing *pickelhaubes*, Austria has elected to forget an incident that tickled the risibles of the world.

Indeed, our Viennese friends have placed Mickey top of the poll in a popularity referendum, Mickey receiving 70,000 votes, or 40,000 more than the number cast for his nearest rival, Emil Jannings.

Were you particularly interested in some article in this issue which you would like someone else to see?

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Robert E. Sherwood
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HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

AUGUST 1, 1931

We Suggest a Cure for Ills of Box-Office

Mr. Nash Writes us About Motion Picture Stocks

We Take a Glance at Fox Financial Affairs

Bob Sherwood Takes Us to Hollywood's Dude Ranch

Reviewed in This Number

TABU
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BIG BUSINESS GIRL
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Perhaps This Might Help the Box-Office

By The Editor

STUDY THE box-office records of pictures recently released. Then scan the list of pictures in production. The result: Every lot is making pictures that will be absolute flops. Ina Claire's *Rebound*, one of the finest talkies yet made, is proving a dismal failure at the box-office, yet Pathé is proceeding to spend an enormous sum on a picture of the same sort in which Ann Harding will star. It can not hope to be better than *Rebound*, but it will have to do much better to justify its making. How is it possible? When Constance Bennett comes back in the fall Pathé will put her in a picture that will be a flop, not on account of any lack of merit that it may possess, but because the public no longer wants the kind of pictures in which she appears.

It does not require a super-brain to reach these conclusions. Anyone who understands what made the film industry rich in the heyday of its prosperity, can not fail to grasp the reason for its present financial predicament nor fail to realize what must be done to make it prosperous again. To lend credence to the predictions I make now I must refer again to the fact that nearly three years ago I predicted precisely what is happening now. If I had been influenced by box-office conditions as they existed then, I would have reached different conclusions; but they interest me now because they establish as a fact what I advanced then as a theory and give me greater confidence in making further predictions, as well as making me surer of the efficacy of the remedy that I feel should be applied.

▼▼ IT WOULD BE ridiculously easy for Hollywood to turn out pictures that immediately would restore box-office prosperity. Even our present producers could do it if they would do a little thinking. What made the film industry such an outstanding success? That is the first thought. It became tremendous as an industry because it was denied a voice and had to remain a purely pictorial art. It told its stories in silence which permitted their accompaniment by music appropriate to their mood and action. The best motion pictures earned a tremendous return on the money invested in them.

The screen was given a voice. If producers had possessed any qualifications whatever for the positions they held, they would have approached the new device cautiously. First they would have retained everything that made silent pictures popular, the basic elements that constituted the foundation upon which the screen's importance as a form of entertainment was reared during the three decades of silence. These elements were first, silence, and then visual flow, an uninterrupted flow of filmic motion that kept the story moving across the screen in an unbroken line. The producers, if they had been able to think, would have recognized that the essential elements of the creations they wished to sell to the public had to be recorded by the camera—that the camera had to be retained as the story-telling medium. Then with caution producers would have handled the sound camera in a manner that would not have disturbed the essential elements.

▼▼ BUT WHAT did the producers do? They went crazy. They threw overboard every element that had contributed to their success, destroyed the visual flow and ignored the camera as the story-telling medium. They began to photograph another art, that of the stage, which has nothing in common with that of the screen. They raised dialogue, the most unimportant element of a talking picture, to the position of chief importance. In short, they did everything possible to murder their business, and they made a beautiful job of it, the only perfect accomplishment they have to their credit. Even now they are continuing the murdering process because they lack the intelligence to understand what they should do to revive the industry. And I doubt if they can understand it when they are told.

Those who prepare continuities should be cautioned to tell their stories with the camera, to avoid every spoken word as if it were poison—which it is—and to resort to audible dialogue only when there was no way of escaping its employment. Here the producers will chirp up that that is what they tell their writers now. Perhaps they do, but when they get their first continuities they turn them over to dialogue writers to cut out action and substitute talking. Any interruption of the flow of story interest—any break in the straight line the visual flow must follow—should be regarded as a major crime.

▼▼ THAT IS ABOUT all there is to suggest. It is all that is necessary to bring prosperity back to the film industry. If production chiefs and their dumb associates would have these points in mind when they viewed rushes, if they realized that telling a story in dialogue completely stops the filmic motion and that anything that is not being told by the camera is being told in a language foreign to that of the screen—if they could understand these things and approved only those rushes

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that recognized their place in screen entertainment, we soon would be having motion pictures again.

Of course as long as we have our present executives the whole thing is impossible, but it's an interesting topic to write about.

Financial Figures

START AN argument with a banker or a broker and he can produce a set of figures to prove that you are wrong. Or, if it suits his purpose, he can use the same set of figures to prove you are right. Since in these pages I have been making references to the instability of the financial structure of the motion picture industry, those interested in film securities have hurled figures at me in epistles that seemed to have been prepared not so much to put me right as to provide carbon copies that could be used to comfort nervous investors. Let us read one of the letters. It was written to me by Robert E. Nash, president of the Nash Investment Corporation, Ltd., which has offices at 6777 Hollywood Boulevard. Mr. Nash:

> In a recent editorial written by you, you mention the present "deplorable" condition of the motion picture industry, and express regret that the old prosperous days of the silent picture are not here. I am at a loss to understand how you arrive at your deductions, and should be pleased if you would let me know if you have any figures to indicate that mine are incorrect, which I quote as follows:
>
> I am merely taking as an example one company, the Paramount-Publix Corporation, inasmuch as that is one of the leading companies of the industry.
>
> On January 1st, 1927, the Paramount Company had assets of $143,893,977. It produced during that year 58 features and distributed 67. Inasmuch as this was a year of silent pictures, and one of general prosperity throughout the country, it is indicative of what the companies could expect from silents. The company had an operating profit that year of $14,204,602 and earned $10.83 a share on 687,259 shares of stock.
>
> During the first year of the talking picture, 1929, the company had assets of $236,710,407 and it produced 57 feature pictures and distributed 66. Sixty-two of these features were talkies and only four silent. Yet in this first year of talkies, despite the fact that it was effecting a complete change in its plant to produce a totally different product, its earnings were $5.79 a share on 2,685,313 shares of stock.
>
> During the year 1930, after the tremendous panic of the Fall of 1929, and a year of depression comparable with any depression period this country has ever witnessed, Paramount operating profits were $31,130,374, approximately 125% greater than those of the silent days of 1927. It may be summed up as follows:
>
> 1927—A year of general prosperity throughout the country—With silents the company had operating profits of $14,204,602.
>
> 1930—A year of terrible depression throughout the country—With talkies the company had an operating profit of $31,130,374.
>
> If you were to apply the 1930 earnings to the stock outstanding under the 1927 capital structure, it would indicate approximately $27 a share for Paramount stock. On the same basis it would indicate earnings of only about $2 a share if you were to apply the earnings from silent pictures to the capital structure of 1930.
>
> Should we take the Fox Film Corporation, I should not think that their unfortunate condition now is due to any large losses caused by talking pictures, but rather is due to over-ambitious financial operations induced, no doubt, by the very bright prospects of talking pictures plus unusual profits during 1929.
>
> Your statements, therefore, that Wall Street and inefficient executives have brought the campanies to their present unfortunate condition, in light of all the facts, are not convincing. If earnings with talkies in a year of terrible depression are greater than with silents in a year of general prosperity, I would say that the Wall Street bankers have done a good job, and that the executives which you say are not worth more than $500 a week are worth far more than that, and probably more than they are now getting.
>
> I should be pleased, therefore, if you would enlighten me as to where you receive your information concerning these companies. A short time ago one of our clients who apparently had read this article of yours called it to our attention and I had to dispute your contentions. If you have any figures to prove that I am wrong and you are right I should indeed be interested in having you enlighten me, and shall be looking forward to your reply.

▼▼ MR. NASH HAS the typical banker-mind, a reverence for figures and a belief in their infallability. His letter shows that he knows a lot about finances and nothing about motion pictures, and when one discusses motion picture finances he should know a little about both. I lost all my faith in figures when the last Fox financial statement showed that the company had earned enough profits last year to pay dividends this year. Compiling figures to make Paramount look prosperous would be easy in comparison. Mr. Nash uses figures to show the tremendous gain in Paramount's assets. Assets really are liabilities, as the first thing a concern must do is earn enough profit to keep the assets intact. When Paramount's assets jumped nearly one hundred million in one year it merely took upon itself that much more responsibility, the hundred million became a liability that had to be preserved.

The big increase in assets represents the acquisition by Paramount of a lot of theatres that since have become the gravest sort of liabilities. The real estate and brick-and-mortar value of a theatre can look imposing on a financial statement, but it is the money that comes in at the box-office that establishes the real value of the theatre from an investment standpoint. Paramount's assets consist largely of theatres that are losing money, under which circumstance they cease to be assets, except in financial statements prepared to comfort investors, and become hungry liabilities. The fact that they are losing money is not apparent in Mr. Nash's figures for his compilations show what Paramount has done in the past, not what it is doing now, nor what it most certainly will do in the future. Yet the value of Paramount shares depends wholly upon what is going to happen, and not upon what has happened. To estimate the value accurately, to be in a position to advise clients intelligently, Mr. Nash would have to understand motion pictures.

▼▼ THOSE WHO KNOW motion pictures know that never before in the history of the industry have box-office conditions

been so disturbing. And those who know motion picture finances know that the whole financial structure of the industry rests upon the box-office. It is the only source of revenue. When talkies were in their novelty stage the box-office receipts climbed to dizzy heights. Those who controlled the industry, the same people who control it now, ignored the novelty value of talkies and credited two-thirds of the increased earnings to their own perspicacity and the other third to the entertainment value of their output. They proceeded on the theory that both the perspicacity and the entertainment value had become permanent assets of their companies. A few people who understand the fundamental principles of screen entertainment, contended from the first that talkies could not continue to attract audiences of sufficient proportions to maintain the prosperity of the industry.

Being unfamiliar with screen fundamentals and therefore unable to see what was ahead, the producing organizations embarked upon a career of wild expenditure, building scores of new theatres, purchasing and leasing hundreds already in operation, and adding enormously to their assets, thus assuming obligations that could be met only if box-office receipts continued at the newly established high level. Obviously if the receipts fell off, the additional assets would become liabilities, even though continuing to appear on financial statements as assets. The receipts fell off to a level lower in proportion to capital investment and operating expense than in the days of silent pictures. From the dawn of the talkies until the present day there has been as great an improvement in the quality of the entertainment as it is possible for talkies to attain, yet as the quality mounted the earnings diminished far past the point for which the general business depression could be held responsible.

▼▼ WE HAVE, then, in the hands of all the major film corporations vast holdings of motion picture properties representing investments that must derive their dividends from the box-offices of houses showing the pictures the corporations are making. In most instances the pictures show a profit over the production cost because of the producers' policy of arbitrarily setting a selling price on their pictures that will provide such profit. But producers can not continue to be prosperous unless exhibitors also are prosperous. The big corporations are both producers and exhibitors, and as exhibitors are losing more money in showing their pictures than they are making in producing them; and as the quality of the entertainment they provide is not responsible for the loss, it becomes apparent that conditions can not be improved by any improvement in the quality.

If we have a capitalization built when receipts were at their peak and depending for its dividend earnings upon the maintenance of the peak level; if receipts are away below the peak and can not be brought back to it by the class of entertainment that provides the company with all its revenue, how can we arrive at the conclusion, that Mr. Nash does, that the financial condition of Paramount is healthy? If the theatres owned or controlled by the major organizations have a right to appear as assets that make financial statements imposing, why are the companies getting rid of as many houses as they can persuade others to take off their hands? There are over seven thousand theatres closed throughout the country, yet it is safe to presume that each of them appears on some financial statement as an asset. An asset that earns nothing ceases to be an asset.

Music

DOWN FILM row the message thunders that musicals are coming back. I don't think song writers are included in the prophecy. Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood seemingly have been parted forever, for which Allah be praised! Before musicals went away to that mysterious Over There to which things must go before they can stage a comeback, Hollywood's conception of musical pictures was a celluloid version of some sob-sing-and-hop thing that had been done on Broadway. And theme songs. Oh, yes, there had to be theme songs—I-love-you-something-or-other—that bobbed up every now and then during the course of the offering. A musical photograph of a stage show was presented as a picture, and after only a little while it was rejected by the public.

To greet the return of the musical picture we have a reception committee composed of the same people who were responsible for its departure. It looks bad. While the musical was away did those who speeded its going learn anything about it? Is Hollywood prepared now to make a better job of it? The same fundamental principles that apply to the making of a talking picture apply to the making of a musical, and Hollywood is making an awful botch of talkies in as far as the box-office is concerned. As talkies, the films the public is getting now are the finest jobs Hollywood ever turned out, but they are not tempting the public past the box-offices. If producers do not know what ails their talkies, how can they hope to make musicals that will not suffer from the same ailments?

▼▼ SCREEN ART is screen art whether it be silent, dialogue or musical. The only pure screen art, of course, is that which is silent, but if dialogue or music or both be used judiciously in composing a picture, there can result a hybrid that will do well at the box-office. The problem that confronts the producers is that of learning how to handle music judiciously. When the sound camera made its bow there was put into Hollywood's hand an opportunity to embrace music as one of the essential elements of its screen creation, but it muffed its chance. It could have given us motion pictures that would have earned profits during the deepest depression, superb examples of filmic motion with musical interpretations that increased their emotional appeal. But, instead, it gave us music that served only to retard or stop the filmic motion, its product ceased to be motion picture and a public that looks for motion pictures ceased to patronize it.

▼▼ IT IS NOT too late yet for Hollywood to sell music to the public. It is a commodity that the public always will buy, but it must come in a proper package. In the screen package must be a motion picture. That is what producers must realize if they expect to make musical films that will bring audiences back to picture houses. First, there must be a story that follows a straight and unbroken line from the fade-in to the final fade-out. Nothing must be hung onto it that is heavy enough either to break the line or to make it sag. Music

can become an element of a motion picture only if it avoids destroying the creation's status as a motion picture. The public turned down musical films solely because they were not motion pictures, and it is turning down talkies for the same reason. It never will turn down a picture in which either dialogue or music is used to advance the story, providing that the camera always is used as the chief story-telling medium.

In turning its attention to the making of musical films the first thing that Hollywood must take into account is that it will not be successful as long as it thinks all it need do is to photograph a musical offering that was a success on the stage. The film industry got into its present mess by photographing stage offerings, by giving the public photographed plays instead of motion pictures. It never will be wholly successful until it creates its own material, material that achieves the peak of expression only when expressed by the camera.

Lost Enthusiasm

NOTHING MORE discerning regarding Hollywood than my distinguished colleague's remarks in the last *Spectator* regarding the deflation of the film capital's bubble of enthusiasm, has appeared in print anywhere. Bob Sherwood laments the passing of the good, old hokumish—and ridiculously extravagant—hoop-la that accompanied any Hollywood happening when pictures were beginning to feel their oats. "Of course it was bunk," writes Sherwood, "but it was georgeous, exciting, stimulating!" All of which is true. Hollywood became a fascinating community because it canned its enthusiasm and sold it to the world. Now it has no enthusiasm left, and its product shows it.

What's happened to all the enthusiasm? Hollywood finally bought itself a tail coat and a plug hat and has been trying to live up to them. It feels that it is undignified for it to slap itself on the back. It no longer is an honest community. It wants to yell its head off just as it used to, but it tries to behave as if it had no such desire. If it were honest, it would yell. All this is vastly amusing to the looker-on, but it has a more serious side. There is no enthusiasm anywhere in the picture business, and it is a business that thrives on enthusiasm, one in which enthusiasm is as much an element as the tangible things that are photographed and shown on the screen. Hollywood still could be the same ebullient, happy-go-lucky community it once was, but motion picture producers have taken all the enthusiasm out of those who possessed it and who could have used it to the benefit of pictures.

▼▼ THE OTHER day there came to me an enthusiastic young Russian with a plan to reduce the cost of producing pictures and at the same time assure their greater box-office value. When he concluded explaining the plan to me he offered me a half interest in it if I would help put it over with the studios. I told him his plan could be made to save each of the big producing organizations over one million dollars a year in production costs and that it could be used also to improve the quality of pictures. I expressed the opinion that every producing organization should grab it no matter what the price. Then I told him to forget it, that there was not the slightest chance of putting it over as no producer would listen to him long enough to grasp what he was talking about.

Before I stopped visiting studios I was the recipient of confidences of people I encountered on the lots. I have listened to scores of good ideas advanced by studio employees who could not even reach their employers to explain the ideas in the hope that they would be adopted. All such ideas were born of the enthusiasm of people who wished to serve the companies for which they work, but the enthusiasm was dissipated by the indifference of the higher-ups who should have been stirred by it. Studio employees have become a plodding mass because producers will not allow them to become anything else. Pictures are cut to standard patterns because individual enthusiasm for a departure from the routine method never becomes contagious. Producers have lost the sparkle and eagerness of the early days and seem to resent their revival in those who work for them. I sigh with Sherwood for the days that were, but I don't see what can be done about it. Perhaps when the banks reorganize the business and we have a new set of executives, we again will find the enthusiasm that was lost.

In that day, which is not far off, my young Russian friend will be able to get someone to listen to him. He will be taken into the first studio he approaches, given an office and the staff he needs, and encouraged to experiment as long as is necessary to establish the practicability of his idea. Perhaps it won't work, but that would not worry an organization that realizes that new ideas and the enthusiasm back of them are things that should be encouraged.

Why Do They Laugh?

WHILE SITTING in a neighborhood house recently waiting for a preview, I ruminated upon the psychology of audience laughter. The feature on the regular program was *White Shoulders*, a very poor picture that had everything in it that is needed for a good one. A poor script and uninspired direction made it monotonous. It was obvious that the original script must have been too long, that too much footage was shot, and that the film was chopped down to releasing length after it reached the cutting room. It was jumpy, but not any more jumpy than it made the audience.

In the picture Jack Holt is the husband of Mary Astor. They have a spat one night and next morning Jack Holt buys, as a peace offering, two gorgeous earrings. As a joke Jack wears the jewels as he enters Mary's bedroom to present the gift. He is madly in love with his wife. He does not find her, but does find a letter stating that she has left him. His ridiculous appearance when the earrings frame his grief-stricken face, adds to the tragedy of the scene, yet the audience howled with laughter. I saw nothing myself to laugh at, but decided that the masquerade was what appealed to the risibilities of the audience.

▼▼ LATER MARY, who has discovered that she had not been divorced from her first husband, discovers his dead body when she enters her apartment. She faints. Again the audience howled with laughter. That stumped me. As one must think

of something when viewing such a picture, which of itself is no mental stimulus, I gave thought to the laughter and decided that it was reaction by the audience to an hour or so of boredom. The fainting scene belonged in the story. Mary fainted nicely, and Mel Brown directed it in a purely conventional manner, yet the audience laughed. If this had occurred at a preview, no doubt the scene would have been eliminated from the release print, yet it was the whole picture, and not that particular scene, that was responsible for the laughter.

Unrelated to the above was an anachronism that will cause a smile to those who know their Monte Carlo. In a scene in a room in a European hotel, Mary asks Jack how long they are going to stay at Monaco, and Jack reads a telegram which states that a friend is going to arrive at the Monaco station at a certain hour. He exits hastily to meet his friend. There is no Monaco station. Monaco is a principality containing only the Condamine on the level land and Monte Carlo on the rock. People of wealth as depicted in the picture would have been in Monte Carlo as it is the only place in the principality that has such hotels. It would be just as sensible in a scene with an American locale for one character to ask another how long he was going to stay "at" the United States, and for a character to rush off to meet a friend "at the United States station." The only difference is that the United States is larger. It is just another example of a motion picture definitely fixing a locale when it is not necessary, and then revealing ignorance of the locale designated.

Wall Street Stupidity

THAT WALL STREET knows nothing about the motion picture business is an assertion that I have made several times. We may assume that careful reviews of the picture situation published in the *Wall Street Journal* present an accurate guage of the degree of intelligence that New York bankers bring to bear upon film finances. Recently the *Journal* analysed the financial statement of the five leading companies. The only bit of optimism in the review was the hope expressed that by next fall box-office conditions would improve. The more immediate prospect that the *Journal* seems to derive comfort from was the possibility of greater economy in production.

If Hollywood were turning out the kind of pictures that the public wants, it could continue to squander money as recklessly as it has in the past and still be highly prosperous. The companies are not going broke because they are spending too much money. They always have spent too much money. Their present alarming financial condition is due to the fact that they are not taking in enough money. And that in turn is due to the fact that the public does not want the kind of pictures Hollywood is making.

▼ ▼ THAT THERE will be no improvement in box-office conditions in the fall becomes apparent when we realize that Hollywood is continuing to turn out the kind of pictures that the public does not want. Because conditions last October were such and such Wall Street presumes that next October they will be the same. That might be true of any business dealing in a staple article of commerce. No matter how hard times are, the public must continue to consume food, wear clothes and ride in automobiles. I might not be satisfied with the kind of clothes limited finances make it necessary that I should purchase because I can't run around like Gandhi. And though I like porterhouse steak I may have to be satisfied with beef stew.

But nothing can force me to patronize entertainment that I do not enjoy. It is not necessary that I should. As an alternative I can stay at home and do my best to enjoy the beef stew, which assures my butcher a steady if meagre revenue. Picture houses, however, will suffer. And they will continue to suffer until they provide entertainment that I will patronize. The picture business is bad, not because the pictures are bad, but because the public doesn't want them.

Fox Finances

DURING THE first thirteen weeks of this year the net earnings of the Fox organization were $3,231,514 less than during the same period in 1930, and in 1930 the earnings were such that a number of prominent bankers crowded themselves onto the Fox directorate in the hope that their wise counsels would improve the company's business. If the ratio of shrinkage—over one million dollars a month—is maintained throughout this year, the bankers will have to do some scratching to get together the $23,500,000, which the company needs to meet its carried-over obligations, and the many additional millions required to take care of the current year's operations. The year is more than half over and during the remaining months it is impossible for Fox to earn the money it must have to keep its head above water. At the end of the year there probably will be more of the juggling that carried the company into this year, but a grand smash is inevitable, a prophecy I made some months ago and which is given strength by the statement which shows the condition of the company at the end of the first three months.

The seed that grew into the Fox financial distress was sown during the period of the company's greatest prosperity, during the first year of talking pictures when they were high in public favor. At that time Fox went over, body, soul and breeches to the stage, and ever since it has tried to earn dividends by selling to the public photographs of stage productions. It put on the market a substitute for the motion picture which had given it its important place among film companies, and in spite of the failure of its new product, it still is persisting in turning it out. The only picture that has been an outstanding success for Fox this year is *Daddy Long Legs*. It has been a success because it is crowded with the good, old-fashioned and honest emotional hokum that the public used to love in the days when motion pictures were made.

▼ ▼ A FILM COMPANY'S prosperity is not maintained by an occasional hit. It depends for its dividends on the run-of-mill product, the ordinary program pictures, leaving the few outstanding hits to provide the extra dividends. To check up the Fox program pictures I went to a neighborhood house a few weeks ago to view *Six-Cylinder Love*. I think it is perhaps the most characterless film I ever saw. It is not bad enough

to exasperate me nor good enough to entertain me. It is just nothing, with some good direction by Thornton Freeland and satisfactory performances by Edward Everett Horton, Sidney Fox and a few others. It is a perfect example of the kind of screen entertainment that reduced the Fox earnings by over three million dollars in less than three months—a photographed stage play that thought it was strutting in motion picture clothes. I stood as much of it as I could, and while I still was awake I left, which makes *Six-Cylinder Love* the fourth picture I have walked out on since I started the *Spectator* over five years ago. In sticking out all the rest I felt I was performing my duty to *Spectator* readers, but even a sense of duty has its limits.

Throw Him Out

GEORGE SHAFFER, who writes a Hollywood column for *The Chicago Tribune*, made Ronald Colman the victim of a deliberate and malicious lie. He credited the Goldwyn star with a statement to the effect that he never accepted an invitation to a social function without having the hostess submit to him a list of the names of the guests; doing this, as Shaffer explained, in order that he would know if any American newspaper person was to be present, in which case Colman would not go or the hostess would have to remove the name of the offending guest from her list. Of course, those of us out here who know Ronnie, know how ridiculous such a statement is. Colman has dined at my house. I am an American newspaper man and he never asked who the other guests were to be.

▼▼ THE YARN is so utterly absurd that it does not warrant even a denial. Yet it can do, and probably is doing, incalculable harm to Colman from a purely commercial standpoint. Papers all over the country have commented on it, and although a denial promptly was put on the trail of the story, it will be like all other denials in that it never will catch up to the lie. Newspapermen who read only the lie, and not knowing Colman, probably will accept it as the truth, with the result that they will have a feeling of antagonism when they approach the reviewing of a Colman picture or the insertion in their columns of publicity about him and his pictures.

Purely as a measure to protect their own business interests, all Hollywood studios should shut their doors to Shaffer and no publicity department should supply him with any information. Hollywood should be made an inhospitable place for liars with newspaper connections.

Don't Buy Now

AS IT APPEARS to me, the "buy now" movement can be of benefit only to producers and can mean nothing whatever to exhibitors. If Hollywood had been turning out pictures that had maintained a satisfactory level of prosperity for exhibitors, they might be justified in going it blind in placing their orders for future deliveries, as there would be no reason for anticipating a falling-off in quality. But Hollywood has not been turning out box-office pictures. It has been supplying film houses with attractions that have failed to attract money to the box-office, and the production program of each of the major organizations this season calls for the virtual duplication of the pictures that the public refused to patronize last year. Why should an exhibitor be in a hurry to buy something that is going to make his business worse?

The big companies are thinking of their own welfare, not that of the exhibitors, when they urge early buying. They need buying orders to spread on the desks of bankers from whom must come the money to keep the companies going. Exhibitors, however, have plenty of financial worries of their own, and I don't see why they should be asked to forget them and think only of those of the companies that are responsible for the box-office slump.

▼▼ WHILE I CAN NOT see one reason why exhibitors should buy now, I can see a great big one why they should buy later. The producing organizations have flooded film publications with flamboyant announcements of the box-office smashes that are going to be made this season. They did the same thing last season and the box-office depression proves that they did not keep their word. Why should exhibitors expect them to live up to this season's promises? If producers did not know last season what the public wanted, what mental revolutions have they gone through to enable them to guess right this season?

But let us suppose that Hollywood is going to send out a flock of box-office pictures during the next twelve months. Will they do any more for the exhibitor if he buys now than they will if he buys later? If the producers are so sure of the new season's quality, what have they to fear if exhibitors don't buy until they have a chance to see what they are buying? The Quigley publications, supported by, and run for, the big producers, are whooping it up for the "buy now" idea. I have no quarrel with that. I like to read publications that stand for something, even though it is something that I can not stand for myself. The Quigley forces maintain an office on the Paramount lot, from which all other film publication representatives are barred, and it is only right that they should do everything in their power to advance the interests of their friends.

So far, however, I have failed to read in a Quigley publication one sound reason why an exhibitor should buy now. Wait and see what the independents are going to offer for sale. The whole "buy now" proposition is aimed at the independent producers from whom ultimately the real box-office pictures will come.

A Free Soul

SURELY THOSE who make our motion pictures will profit by the lesson that *A Free Soul* can teach them. Undoubtedly the story was selected because it had a heroine who keeps some of her night-clothes in the apartment of a gangster whom she visits regularly during several months, and when she leans back bewitchingly as her arms reach for her lover, we get an eyeful of leg bare to the hip. If all this is not in Adela Rogers St. Johns' story, it at least is in the picture, and that is the kind of heroine we have. Metro has made a lot of money showing Norma Shearer in such parts—a nice, refined girl being exploited in nasty roles solely because they were nasty. I incurred the violent wrath of the studio heads because I called *Strangers May Kiss* what it is, a filthy picture which presented prostitution for its own sake and without the usual alibi that the story teaches a moral lesson. In the hope that its success at the box-office would be duplicated by *A Free Soul*, the latter story was selected for its smut content.

But it happened that Clarence Brown directed and that in its cast are Lionel Barrymore, Leslie Howard and Clark Gable, and the picture emerges as a magnificent example of the talkie art, perhaps the best talkie we have had, and there is nothing in it to offend the most sensitive person who views it. It is the greatest acting talkie that Metro has turned out, and it is scoring a success, not on account of the loose morals it exploits, but in spite of them. Again we have a thoroughly immoral heroine, but for the first time we have a director who refuses to allow the immoral element to mar the perfection of his artistic creation. He makes the immorality an incident, and builds his picture with magnificent acting and brilliant direction until it becomes an artistic triumph.

▼ ▼ THE LESSON the picture should teach the industry is that the public always may be counted on to respond to anything fine in its screen entertainment. Throughout the existence of the *Spectator* I have pleaded the cause of distinctive characterizations and have urged producers to entrust principal roles to veteran artists who know how to act. But, maintained the producers, the public wants youth on the screen, and to such an extent was this belief allowed to govern production, the screen figured but little as an acting art and became merely a pictorial record of the poses of youthful people. This was carried so far that it contributed greatly to the falling off in theatre attendance during the last year of the silent picture. The everlasting exploitation of youth had the inevitable effect of standardizing stories, and the public grew tired of what it was getting.

Free Soul is a great picture, first, because it was given great direction by Clarence Brown, and, second, because of the performance given by Lionel Barrymore, the finest ever seen on the screen. I place the direction first because unless Brown had displayed a fine sense of story values, unless he had had a sympathetic understanding of the character played by Barrymore, such a performance would not have been possible. The performance is not notable merely as a piece of acting. It is notable as a finely drawn characterization, perfect in itself and perfect as a part of the whole. In that superb scene between Barrymore and Norma Shearer in which the daughter exacts from her father a promise never to take another drink, the work of Barrymore is dazzling. The craving for rum and the love for his daughter are at war with one another, and in every word he utters, every gesture he makes, Barrymore registers what a struggle it is, until, when daughter-love wins, we know full well that eventually the result will be reversed. The death scene in the court-room is more spectacular and Barrymore pours himself into it until it becomes terrific in its revelation of a tortured and repentant mind, but to me it does not equal for sheer brilliancy the more quiet encounter between father and daughter.

▼ ▼ MOVING UNOBTRUSIVELY through the picture in a part that is almost incidental, is Leslie Howard, and I will consider myself fortunate if ever I see on the screen a performance that is a more brilliant exhibition of acting than Howard gives us. Assigning Clark Gable the role of a gangster chief whom Norma quite reasonably might love was another exhibition of wise casting. There is a strong contrast between the two men who enter her life—Howard, quiet, reserved, always the gentleman; and Gable, loud, dominating and always the bully—physical and mental contrasts, each of which lends strength to the other. James Gleason has a part unlike most of those I have seen him play, and for the first time there seemed to be something missing in his performance.

I assume that a star of the box-office importance of Norma Shearer is consulted in the selection of her supporting cast. If the assumption be correct, we must respect Norma for the bravery she displays. She put herself in a difficult position when she elected to take care of herself in such company. The story really is about the father, and Barrymore's superb acting makes his theft of the picture complete, but Norma will not disappoint her fans, among whom I am numbered. In a few places in this picture her gestures are a bit extravagant, but her performance as a whole is excellent.

Never the Twain Shall Meet

HERE IS another picture whose reception by the public proves that if the film industry persists in trusting its chances of a return of prosperity to outright talkies, it never will be prosperous again. The Peter B. Kyne story made into a talkie by Metro, directed by W. S. Van Dyke and entrusting its main characterization to that superb actor, Leslie Howard, succeeds in being one of the finest bits of screen entertainment of the sort that has been offered us this season, and still it is making scarcely a ripple in box-offices. Of course producers, to justify the making of talkies, will argue that the picture has no established box-office names in the cast, but in the silent days an offering with as many excellent qualities would have been an outstanding success that would have

established some of the members of its cast as box-office favorites. It would have made Howard a star overnight, and Van Dyke would have been hailed for what he is, one of our really great directors, a reputation that he can not earn by making talkies. When the public does not take talkies themselves seriously, it scarcely will accord praise to those who make them.

When it gets about one-third of its way along its course, *Never the Twain Shall Meet* drags so much that it almost stops, but it takes a leap upward when it presents a quarrel scene between Howard and Clyde Cook, a magnificently acted and beautifully directed scene that is a cinematic gem. Before that, of course, there are some splendidly done scenes, but they are separated by dull spots, but from the quarrel scene to the final fadeout the story flows along smoothly, the acting is of the finest quality and the direction is masterly. Pictorial beauty, always a feature of a Van Dyke picture, is very prominent in this production. Some of the glorious shots that Metro had left over when it cut the picture that Van Dyke made in the South Seas, are used to good effect in this one.

▼ ▼ IT IS THE first time I have seen Leslie Howard on the screen. He is every bit as good as I would expect him to be after seeing him in *Berkeley Square*. He practically is all there is to *Never the Twain* until Clyde Cook comes onto the screen and shares the honors of some of the scenes with him. The gradual disintegration of Howard's character until it almost touches bottom, is brought out by as beautiful an exhibition of acting as I have seen on the screen, and reflects the greatest credit on the director. Cook's work in this picture should earn for him many other opportunities to demonstrate what a fine character actor he is. Karen Morley is a young woman whom I never saw before. I hope her presence is sprinkled here and there through all the rest of the pictures I see. She reminds me of all the pleasant screen memories I have—a wholesome girl, rich in that quality that endears Kay Johnson to her audiences.

Conchita Montenegro is featured with Howard. She proves thoroughly satisfactory. C. Aubrey Smith, Mitchell Lewis and Hale Hamilton have smaller parts, and each of them does excellently. In a recent review of *Drums of Jeopardy* I overlooked crediting Hamilton with good work. I have seen him on the screen quite often of late and he always is capable and agreeable.

I suppose *Never the Twain* has played its way out of these parts, but if you have missed it and happen to find it blazoned on any marquee, don't overlook it. There is much in it that you will admire.

▼ ▼ ▼

▼ ▼ THE OTHER night some of us were comparing notes on stage comedies we had seen. When it became my turn to tell of the one that caused me most laughter I surprised my guests by stating that it was one done in French and which I had seen in London before I knew a word of the French language; that there was practically no pantomime and that all the comedy was carried in the lines. I explained. Some London friends asked me to accompany them one Sunday night to witness a performance being put on by a company that was coming over from Paris for this one occasion. I couldn't get out of it even after protesting that my ignorance of the French language was complete. After the curtain went up the only thing that held my interest was the fat neck of the man in the seat in front of mine. The neck protruded above the collar, and I noticed that it would grow purple a moment before the man burst into laughter at a bit of humor in the lines. I thought I might as well beat the audience to it. As soon as I would notice the neck beginning to get purple, I would laugh out loud, and the audience, including the fat man, got its cue from me. It struck me as being so funny that I couldn't restrain myself, and soon I almost was screaming as soon as a suggestion of purple appeared. The performance was a terrific success, and my friends, after chiding me for professing ignorance of French, congratulated me upon grasping the humor in the lines before even the French people in the audience.

▼ ▼ SHE'S ELEVEN, she writes me from Minneapolis, and whenever I write anything about my dog and cat companions her father gives her the *Spectator* and shows her where to look. I've mentioned the names of Virgil and Stingy, the terriers, and Charles, the huge black cat, she says, but I haven't given the name of the orange Persian kitten. What is it? We call him Lester, Barbara, for no reason whatever, unless it be that we never have heard of a cat named Lester. And then Barbara gets down to the serious purpose of her communication. She has a little dog that she likes very much. She likes me, too. Her father tells her that Virgil was a man, and her father's name is Charles. If I call a dog and a cat after men, would it be all right if she called her dog after me? Her mother thinks it a perfectly awful thing to ask me, but can she do it? Well, Barbara, I don't know. I've had a pretty tough time all my life living up to Dr. Beverly Welford, the fine old man after whom I am named, and I'm not quite sure that I want to take on the added burden of living up to anything as noble as a good dog. I can't match him for unselfish devotion, loyalty, faithfulness. . . . Stingy has waddled into my library and I've consulted him about it. Go ahead. Perhaps your dog won't mind it, and I know it will make me proud.

▼ ▼ SOME WEEKS ago Edwin Schallert, in the *Los Angeles Times*, roundly scored the film industry for some of its ways. Since that time a number of film papers have been trying to discover just what the *Times* and the industry have quarreled about. They agree that the Los Angeles paper must be mad about something. That the film industry was criticised because it deserved criticism apparently has occurred to no one. Our film barons are so sure of themselves that they really believe adverse comment on their manner of running the business is inspired by personal animus. Joe Schenck once told me that I was a menace to the film industry because I had written that it was an insane proceeding for him to pay more than one hundred thousand dollars for *Sons o' Guns*. He actually thought that characterizing any of his acts as unwise imperilled all Hollywood. Louis B. Mayer accused me of trying to blackmail the industry. That interested me. Perhaps, I thought, I am going through all the motions of the skilled blackmailer,

but I am getting nothing out of it. I asked Louis to put me wise. But, unfortunately, nothing came of it. However, if any producer thinks I am blackmailing him, I would be glad to receive his check.

▼ ▼ ROB WAGNER can't work up a quarrel with me by writing in his breezy *Script* that I harp too much on one thing—that I keep repeating myself too much. I know I do. I'd like to talk it over with Rob. Am I to write to entertain *Spectator* readers, or am I to take up a cause and keep pounding away at it until results are accomplished or until I desist through sheer ennui? I want the motion picture industry to get back into the business of making pictures that the public will patronize. I think I know how it should be done. To get anywhere I have to keep pounding away, for I am trying to get impressions into brains protected by exceedingly thick skulls. Nothing can be driven home by one blow. What would Rob have me do—desert the cause after one blow, or keep on hammering? Lest *Spectator* readers who do not see the *Script* might get the impression that Rob was attacking me viciously and that we are ready always to fly at one another's throat, I wish to point out that the reference to my sin of repetition came in course of some exceedingly kind and flattering references to the new *Spectator*, to Bob Sherwood, to Dalton Trumbo and to myself.

▼ ▼ IF WE MAY judge from the number being turned out, principally by independent producers, the market for westerns is brisk. They are being made to satisfy the cravings of audiences for action on the screen, but if one I saw in preview the other night reflects the treatment all of them are getting, I am afraid they will talk themselves to death as all other forms of screen entertainment are doing. It was *Branded*, a Columbia picture starring Buck Jones and directed by Ross Lederman. The usual western story was used again, but I couldn't get interested in it because it was talked instead of being acted as it used to be in the silent days. It is appalling to contemplate the manner in which independents are overlooking the greatest chance they ever had. There are ten words spoken in *Branded* to every one that need be spoken. But by way of compensation it has some glorious scenery, beautifully photographed by Benjamin Kline. And I like Buck Jones. He is a he-man sort of guy who belongs in a saddle.

▼ ▼ IN HIS two-weeks-ago contribution to these dignified pages Bob Sherwood praised the food that one can get hereabouts, and picked out for commendation these restaurants which he mentioned by name: the Victor Hugo, Stark's, Brown Derby, Ambassador, George's and Armstrong & Schroder's. Bob wasn't here very long before he found out how chatter writers eat. The thing that makes me sore is that I never thought of it. I don't suppose that even repeating all the names here will get me anything.

▼ ▼ M. H. AYLESWORTH, president of the National Broadcasting Company, stated publicly that he wouldn't know the difference between a vacuum tube and an inner tube. The papers seemed to think that this was a remarkable statement to come from the executive head of a company in whose operations the vacuum tube figured so largely. There is nothing remarkable about it. Aylesworth is an executive. He hires people who know what vacuum tubes are. There is no reason why he should know. He puts his mind on things that he can't hire people to attend to. In pictures we find just the reverse. A film executive is a man who fusses all day over little things and who never gets around to the big ones. He hires people for specific jobs and then won't let them perform them. They fuss so much about a vacuum tube that the whole radio set gets away from them.

▼ ▼ WHEN I READ *Queer People* I found here and there in its pages some excellent writing, consequently I derived some satisfaction from the reading even though the book dealt with a Hollywood that was utterly foreign to me and about which I knew nothing. I picked up *Whitey* expecting to find some more good writing. I spent two hours and a half reading it without discovering anything to justify anyone's spending five minutes on it. *Queer People* at least pretended to be portraying a phase of life in the world's most interesting community. The central character was merely one of the instruments used to make the recital graphic. We become interested in him only as an instrument. In *Whitney* he is presented for his own sake, the authors being under the mistaken impression that it was his character that attracted attention to the first book. *Whitey* is trashy, vulgar and disgusting. And I might add, brainless. Apparently the Graham brothers are one-book authors.

▼ ▼ RECENTLY I got the lowdown on the government's persistency in persecuting screen people in connection with their income tax returns. Of course we know in Hollywood that people with big names are picked out on account of the publicity that will ensue, but it is something to have it confirmed by one of the internal revenue department men. I backed this bird into a corner and for a long time held him spell-bound by the eloquence I put into my denunciation of him and his kind for their hounding of the personnel of the film industry when no doubt there were more irregularities to be found among the pork packers of Chicago. The internal revenue man acknowledged that such might be the case, but claimed that there was more advertising value in a motion picture name.

▼ ▼ METRO'S RETAKE system still is hard at work. Out on the Culver City lot they're doing something to a picture that was completed and previewed. In the revision all the original is being retained except the title and story, and a different director is on the job. The cast remains more or less intact. By the time the rehash is released Metro will have made two pictures, and the price exhibitors will have to pay for the second will be based on the total cost of both. By this method of accounting there will be nothing on the Metro books to show that a lot of money was wasted when the studio shot the first version without knowing what it was doing. Great thing, bookkeeping.

▼ ▼ THE STUDIOS are turning out pictures that are counted upon to attract children to picture houses because the casts are composed chiefly of children. Children on the screen will draw children only when the stories are the kind that will entertain both children and adults. *Skippy* was that kind of picture, and

so far it is the only one we've had that was successful. You can't get children interested in childish pictures. I hope I'm wrong, but my fear is that we are going to have a batch of flops when the children's pictures begin to appear. I don't know any studio with a record to indicate that it knows how to make screen entertainment that youngsters will enjoy and that at the same time won't bore their elders.

▼ ▼ ONE OF THE many things I like about the screen version of *An American Tragedy* is Von Sternberg's disregard of the sociological premise laid down by Dreiser—that any son of a pair of street preachers would grow up to be a murderer. Dreiser is a man of fixed and violent sociological convictions and advances them energetically in his books. Von Sternberg in his picture reports the incidents which Dreiser describes in his novel and does not concern himself with the espousal of any theories. That is why it is good screen entertainment.

▼ ▼ IN THE *Spectator* of March 19, 1927, I wrote: "*An American Tragedy* could be made into a wonderful picture." It has been.

▼ ▼ IN AN INTERVIEW in *Variety* C. B. deMille says: "First of all pictures must be commercial, but I fully believe that the more artistic they are, the more commercial they will be." That's what the *Spectator* has been saying for years.

▼ ▼ WE WERE on our way for a week-end at Catalina. My host, who owned the yacht, was proud of his skill as a navigator. I challenged him to determine by dead-reckoning exactly where we were. He set about it and did a lot of figuring. Finally he announced our location. We looked it up and found that we were in the center of the state of Oklahoma. I was glad we could see land.

▼ ▼ WHEN THE studios get back to turning out box-office pictures as part of their routine they are going to turn out pictures that have synchronized scores. Part of the present box-office depression is due to the fact that picture audiences are deprived of the music that always played such a prominent place in screen entertainment. Sometimes in Warner pictures there are musical accompaniments to some of the sequences. I am confident that they have audience appeal that would warrant their being made continuous throughout the production. It is one of the things that are bound to come.

▼ ▼ PICTORIAL one- and two-reel subjects with off-stage voices supplying a verbal accompaniment to what we are looking at always will be popular with the public. The rodeo picture made by M-G-M and in which the voice of Pete Smith is heard is one of the choicest little bits of entertainment I have seen in a long time. Pete's lines are not only witty in themselves, but he speaks them in a manner that enhances the effect of the wit. I don't know if Pete can continue to be funny, but if he can, Metro should keep him in its short subject department. He could become a gold mine for his bosses.

▼ ▼ WHEN *I* REVIEWED *Strangers May Kiss* I made the high-and-mighties at Metro furious by saying that they should be ashamed of themselves for making such a dirty picture. As usual, they produced box-office figures to prove that I was wrong. I advised them that two more pictures like it would destroy Norma Shearer's box-office value. From all over the country are coming protests against such a nice girl being presented in a series of such dirty parts. When I made Metro mad I merely was anticipating these protests.

▼ ▼ THE MOTION Picture Relief Fund did itself a good turn when it elected Conrad Nagel as its president. Conrad is one of those people who are born to help their neighbors. He gives a great deal of intelligent and unselfish labor to any cause that has as its objective the betterment of conditions in the film industry. As president of the Relief Fund he has a big job which he will attend to in his usual big way.

▼ ▼ I THINK I'll organize the Picture Patrons of America, Inc. The first thing we'll do will be to apply to the courts for an order restraining Fox from putting Janet Gaynor in a singing part. Then, just to please Bob Sherwood, we'll abolish platinum blondes.

▼ ▼ A SCIENTIST claims that mosquitoes can fly for fourteen hours without landing. Apparently it always was my luck, when I lived in places where mosquitoes lived also, to encounter them just as they concluded their fourteen-hour flights.

▼ ▼ ▼

An "Exquisite" Critic

(George Jean Nathan in Judge)

Oh, to be out of the theatre, now that Spring is here—that's the nathanal anthem.

What Welford Beaton says:

"BUT to me the choicest spot
IN the valley is the
SANTA Maria Inn
WHERE Frank McCoy is at home
AND runs an Inn for his friends.
AND has a perpetual flower show
IN his dining room."

Frank J. McCoy, Manager
Santa Maria Inn,
Santa Maria, California

Notes from Hollywood's Dude Ranch

By R. E. Sherwood

It was Al Jolson who applied the term, "The Dude Ranch," to the United Artists' Studio, and seldom have I heard of an apter label. There is an atmosphere of aristocratic elegance about the place which ill accords with the rough and ready traditions of the old West.

One has the feeling, when strolling about the United Artists' lot (one never hurries), that at any moment one may encounter the Duke of Sutherland or Laddie Sanford or Mrs. Vanderbilt Church trying hard, though not with entire success, to look like natives of Hollywood. This consideration does much to promote the right morale among the hired hands. It is very comforting to know that even though one may be doing menial work one is being given the opportunity to meet the Best People.

My only employment on this visit to the film capital has been at United Artists—with Douglas Fairbanks and with Howard Hughes. Consequently, my knowledge of life in the other studios is limited. But whenever I drop in at Paramount or Fox to visit friends, I consider that I'm slumming.

▼▼ If one becomes very social at United Artists, one also becomes aggressively athletic. The whole organization is in danger of growing muscle-bound.

This, of course, is entirely attributable to Douglas Fairbanks. When he first started the studio on Santa Monica Boulevard, he must have stipulated that it was to be devoted primarily to physical culture and only secondarily to the manufacture of motion pictures.

Those who have come into United Artists since then have studiously followed Doug's example. There is hardly a property man or cutter on the lot who can't put the shot or go around Flint Ridge in 76 or run the hundred in 9.5 seconds.

It wouldn't surprise me in the least to learn that Sam Goldwyn is training for the high hurdles in the 1932 Olympics in his spare time, if any.

▼▼ When I return to drab, dreary New York City, which will be any day now, I shall miss the old Dude Ranch, where I have spent such a happy summer mingling with Burke's Peerage, the Social Register, the N. V. A. and the All-America eleven, and gaping at Miss Billie Dove in her areonautical Jodhpurs.

American Humor

▼▼ It is an obvious fact that the film producers are terribly hard put to it to compete with the daily newspapers in the telling of melodramatic stories. Even that super-thriller, *The Public Enemy* was topped by the episode of "Two-Gun" Crowley.

There is precisely the same competition in the matter of comedy. Almost any daily paper contains in its columns more loud laughs than are to be derived from an evening of Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Mickey Mouse combined.

I saw a superb demonstration of this the other day at Grauman's Chinese Theatre. Here was a picture, *Young as You Feel*, starring one great American humorist, Will Rogers, with a story written by another great American humorist, George Ade. It should have been full of fine comedy and it was. But the greatest yell of laughter that came from the huge audience was provoked by no witticism of Mr. Rogers' or Mr. Ade's; it broke out when one of the minor characters uttered the phrase, "What a man"

▼▼ Will Rogers is very funny, and so is George Ade—but neither of them can hope to outdo Ma Kennedy as a purveyor of true American humor.

Teutonic Gaul

▼▼ The cinema has always been full of strange contradictions, but the strangest of all to me is Ernst Lubitsch's sense of humor. Where did he get it? Somewhere, in his Teutonic ancestry, there must have been one lone Frenchman. It may well have been Voltaire himself who, you will remember, spent a great deal of time at Potsdam.

I have seen many good German comedies, and laughed heartily at translated jokes from *Fliegende Blaetter* and *Simplicissmus*, so I am making no remarks that may be interpreted as insults to the wit of the German race. But Lubitsch's peculiar type of humor simply does not fit in a Teuton. Its specific gravity is far too low. It is not only French: it is one hundred per cent Parisian.

Undoubtedly, some of the nimble gaiety in *The Love Parade* and *The Smiling Lieutenant* may be attributed to the influence of Chevalier, in whose infectious presence everyone seems to become French. That, however, does not account for the softness of the Lubitsch touch in such memorable comedies as *The Marriage Circle* and *Forbidden Paradise*, produced long before Chevalier had moved from the slopes of Montmartre to the gold-filled hills of California.

▼▼ Whether Lubitsch derives his precise, delicate style from France, Germany, or Mr. B. P. Schulberg, he has it, and it is unique. However, there is a distinct line between a style and a formula, and I am afraid that *The Smiling Lieutenant* does not quite observe the boundary.

I have remarked elsewhere that Lubitsch seems to be getting a little tired. His powers of invention have appreciably diminished, the result being that his latest efforts are stenciled but not colored. The familiar trademark is distinctly visible upon *The Smiling Lieutenant*, but the familiar flavor is somewhat missing.

Grateful thanks on behalf of the Great Public, until now unaccountably withheld, are herewith presented to the Bard of Astoria. He has put upon the screen the first violin case in three years that does not contain a machine gun.

Don't Mention the Weather

▼▼ It is and has been for the last three weeks so terribly hot in Los Angeles and adjacent regions that you could swim through the air. Thousands of people have been paralyzed,

prostrated, stricken, agonized, tortured, and annoyed by the heat. Myself, accustomed only to the mild New York summers, have been unable to stand it.

(The above is the only accurate weather report that has been printed west of Riverside in thirty years. Exhaustive researches in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Los Angeles Examiner* and other local journals over the last few weeks have yielded hundreds of stories concerning a sixty-two year old man who died from the heat in Jacksonville, Florida. He was also run over by a street car but the Los Angeles County coroner, rushed to Jacksonville by plane, announced the death to be from sun stroke. Local weather reports are unanimously hidden in the classified ad section where they simply state the temperature for the preceding day—in three figures.)

After one appallingly hot day, I consulted the *Los Angeles Times* and noticed on the front page a long story about the horrible conditions in the Middle West. Chicago, it seemed, was sweltering in a 94° temperature, and Fargo, North (or maybe it's South) Dakota, was even worse. There was no intimation, however, of any tepidity in Southern California.

On page 22, the *Times* finally broke down and confessed that it had also been 94° the day before in Los Angeles. Southern California was therefore just as hot as Northern Illinois—but it didn't make the front page.

Evidently, when the weather is terrible in Los Angeles, it isn't news.

Junior

▼▼ Having seen Raymond Massey play *The Man in Possession* in London—and it was a brilliant performance—I went to the Mayan Theatre two weeks ago with grave misgivings. I knew Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., to be an earnest, ambitious youth, with high ideals, and I hated to see him suffering by comparison with a really fine actor.

You can imagine my consternation on discovering that this inexperienced stripling was, in most respects, just as good as Raymond Massey, and in some respects appreciably better.

Young Doug has no need of experience. He was born with it. He has a sense of comedy that could not be acquired in fifty years of steady trouping, the sense that has been apparent in every performance his father ever gave, the sense that was the distinguishing feature of young Jack Barrymore in the days before he had graduated from *The Fortune Hunter* to the Warner Brothers.

If Douglas, Junior, finds the right play, and does it in New York, he will be a sensational success—and those are words that I don't expect to eat.

Literary Lumber

▼▼ Two weeks ago, in this journal, Mr. Beaton urged the film producers to buy their stories as they buy their lumber. That is to say, not in the form of logs but in the form of planks and beams, cut to specification. He added: "I don't see why a screen author should not be asked to do something that a sawmill does without being asked."

Now I don't want any suggestion of friction to be apparent in the *Hollywood Spectator*, but overwhelming curiosity impels me to ask: "Just what does this mean?" For my part, I can't quite see why an author should be asked to do what a sawmill does, nor why a sawmill should be asked to do what an author does. Sawmills are useful in their way, and authors are useful in theirs (though there may be some debate on this last point). But it is impossible for me to understand why either one should imitate the other.

Perhaps Mr. Beaton means that authors should heed the ancient injunction to "saw wood and say nothing"—an excellent idea which, however, fails to answer the important question: who is going to furnish the wood?

▼▼ Some ten years ago, Samuel Goldwyn attempted to start a classic grove at his studio in Culver City. He imported Mary Roberts Rinehart, Rupert Hughes, Rex Beach, Gouverneur Morris, Maurice Maeterlinck and other giant redwoods, and he then proceeded to reduce them to pulp. It was not a successful experiment, as Mr. Goldwyn himself will be the first and last to testify.

For the trouble always seems to be that those who grow the trees can't seem to whittle them into the tooth-picks that the movie people require.

Advance Farewell

▼▼ Allusion has been made of the fact that I am about to return whence I came, and it may be another nine years before I again become a paid guest in Hollywood (which, by that time, may have sunk beneath the sea). So if Miss Garbo is as anxious to meet me as they say she is, she'd better hurry up and send around that invitation I've been waiting for.

Once back in New York, I shall rush to the Roxy, Capitol, Paramount and Little Carnegie Playhouse and see the pictures that, for one reason or another, I have failed to catch out here, and I shall write complaining letters about them to Mr. Beaton. If it turns out that I participated in the preparation of any of the future flops, I shall keep my mouth shut.

So even though I may not be here to remind you of it, don't fail to advertise heavily in the *Hollywood Spectator*. And don't think that Mr. Beaton will fail to reciprocate. If you take a quarter-page, your name will be barely mentioned in these columns; if you take a half-page, you'll be subjected to a mild rap; but a *full* page will get you the panning of your life.

▼ ▼ ▼

Economy on Film Rentals

(The Allied Exhibitor)

To get by next year every exhibitor will have to economize in every way he can and especially on film rentals. The exhibitor who pays as much next year for pictures as he did this, can not hope to survive. The product is almost certain to be poorer and economic conditions will be worse. With the present depressed business conditions aggravated by the inevitable wage reductions, it is difficult to see where you are going to find your patrons. The plain meaning of all this is that the theatre owners must follow the lead of the producers and economize, and the best place to economize is on film rentals. Do not buy until after your local association has held its convention and you have had an opportunity to consult with your leaders and acquaint yourself with conditions. Shop around as much as your competitive situation will permit. Make the very best bargain you can. But above all, wait.

New Screen

(To-day's Cinema, England)

Mr. J. V. Bryson has once again shown his enterprise by trying out a new type of screen at the Universal private theatre. This is made of perforated zinc, coated with a white composition. The perforations are sufficiently great in proportion to the area of the screen to offer very little obstruction to the sound from behind the screen—and the screen is washable.

The Biography of A Film Executive

By Dalton Trumbo

HAD ANYONE told me a week ago that I would read the biography of a business man, and enjoy it, I would have laughed outright. And if I had been informed a year ago that John Drinkwater would write such a book, I might have been tempted to inform the lunacy commission. And finally, if I had been told that the captain of industry thus to be honored was a motion picture executive, I should probably have passed into complete unconsciousness. Yet the thing has been done, the book written, and I have enjoyed it thoroughly. Drinkwater's *The Life and Adventures of Carl Laemmle* stands out in my mind as the first biography dealing with an absolutely honest business man.

It is not the type of book that occasionally floods the market eulogizing our Rockefellers, Fords, Schwabs and other dollar-snatchers. The immense authority of Drinkwater stands behind the volume and insures its authenticity. What Drinkwater chooses to tell, I choose to believe, and believing, I stand in considerable awe of this man whom they call Uncle Carl. There is a strain of sturdy genius flowing through the veins of Universal's chieftain, and the unfolding of that genius against every conceivable adversity embodies a drama that is high and utterly fine. Whoever chooses to read the story of the Jewish boy born at Laupheim, Wurttemberg, who entered the motion picture business after forty and guided it to the present time, will emerge from the heated narrative with a vast respect not only for Laemmle, but for the industry which he cherishes as a flaming passion.

▼▼ IT WAS HIGH time that something like this book be done. For too many years have motion pictures been treated as an illegitimate child. For too long a time have sniffish but hungry folk from the oracles of drama and literature castigated the rich youngster which, for all its brawling and ballyhoo, has so outgrown its elders that it is now a little absurd for the elders even to be jealous. Motion pictures as an art and industry are permanent. They have stormed the barricades, captured the outposts, and although they are at present in an exceedingly billious state, a good purgative shortly to be administered will leave them intrenched more strongly than ever. And when a man whose studies of Abraham Lincoln, Robert Burns, Cromwell, Robert E. Lee, Charles II and Pepys turns his pen to an analysis of a mere film executive, it denotes a growing significance which will one day make motion pictures an integral part of the nation's cultural life.

It pleases those aesthetic fellows who parade through the Algonquin in New York to emphasize the low origin of motion picture producers. They point with elegant fingers to the fact that Carl Laemmle was a clothing store proprietor, that Samuel Goldwyn sold gloves, that Jesse Lasky was a mere cornetist and not such a good one at that, that William Fox made his living by sponging cloth, and that Adolph Zukor displayed more early genius for furs than for motion pictures. The fact that Lincoln was a rail splitter, or that practically all the present generation of English poets found their origins uncomfortably close to a coal mine counts for nothing to them. History and biography are not founded upon origin, but rather upon destination, and in the latter field Carl Laemmle has delivered the goods magnificently.

▼▼ HERE IS A MAN who did not find himself until he was forty. He came to America as a boy, was rousted about in New York, pushed further west, and probably reached the ebb tide of his fortunes when he set forth upon an ill-fortuned adventure as a farm hand. In his thirties we find him a married man, managing a store in Oshkosh, where his determined advertising and uncompromising business ethics managed to sell more suits at $9.98 than any other store in town. Here was certainly success of a sort—success above the average. Millions of men would have been contented to stay in Oshkosh for the remainder of their lives, and millions are doing it. But stagnation was not a part of the Laemmle constitution, and when a disagreement arose with his employer, he discovered that he had resigned and was adrift in Chicago without any considerable capital.

It was then that the cinema attracted him. And it was a momentous day for the film industry when Carl Laemmle opened his first theatre, The White Front, and followed it shortly with The Family Theatre. It was a gift of fortune that he found himself in the midst of a rapidly expanding enterprise. The Laemmle Film Service followed and more houses. He soon was in the pleasing position of being the largest film renter in the country. Then came the Trust with its newly secured control of all basic patents dealing with motion pictures, and the co-operation of Eastman in the matter of films. The industry was tied up in as complete a monopoly as ever threatened the country. The outrageous two-dollar-a-week license was imposed upon all exhibitors along with a dozen more restrictions. Fines were assessed freely, and from them there was no appeal. It was either obey the dictates of the Trust and the General Film Company or cease showing motion pictures. It was then that Laemmle rose to his heights.

▼▼ MOTION PICTURES had become infiltrated in his blood stream. He saw them not only as an opportunity for becoming wealthy. They were a mission, a flaming hope which could not be ignored. To the vast amusement of the Trust, Carl Laemmle bolted the harness which had been fastened to his enterprises and announced that he would break the Trust. For six years he carried the brunt of the most vicious industrial battle in the country. His Independent Motion Picture Company, known as IMP, was established. He begged and threatened, imported and almost stole to obtain films and other necessities for his production schedule. He was hounded by spies, strong-arm men, and the courts. In three years two hundred and eighty-nine suits were filed

against him by a corps of seventeen attorneys representing the Trust.

He retaliated wih flamboyant advertisements against "General Flimco" and the Trust. He lambasted them from every angle, fought them tooth and nail, instituted legal proceedings of his own, and through it all continued to manufacture motion pictures. He fled to Cuba in an effort to evade his persecutors, and in that torrid and unkind climate turned out several productions. King Baggot and Mary Pickford were added to the players for IMP. Laemmle inaugurated the star system along with many other innovations. He battled magnificiently for six years, facing ruin and utter destruction at every turn, and in 1915 the Trust was dissolved as a direct result of his efforts. The first picture shot by IMP was *Hiawatha*, and it should be placed in the Smithsonian Institute to immortalize a struggle which saved an industry.

▼▼ THE UNDISPUTED leader of an industry that was threatening to become the greatest in the world, he turned his peace time efforts toward Universal City. The same success which had attended his other enterprises held with him in the venture, and he dominated Hollywood. He had become a world figure. His collection of photographs and autographs includes the mighty of the earth. By them he is honored, but no less than he is honored by those who are associated with him in his enterprises. Then only a year ago came another crisis at Universal City. Business was bad, and a new policy was decided upon. Uncle Carl changed from a production list of regular features to quality production. *All Quiet* and *The King of Jazz* were the first concrete results of that change, and again the daring of Laemmle was vindicated.

Those are his achievements, and they are mighty enough. But the manner of man who accomplished them and the honest methods which have been his business religion are matters of more consequence. Throughout the distracting struggle with the Trust Carl Laemmle never once descended to the dirt-throwing proclivities of his companions. His gaudy advertisements were true, and his operation was devoid of spies and thugs. His supremely human consideration for those who were weaker than he and his magnificent defiance of those who were stronger denotes a courage that his small body does not appear to hold. He has been a fierce fighter, but a clean one.

▼▼ I LIKE TO think of the Thomas Ince fire which destroyed that producer's sets, properties and studio, confronting him with immediate ruin in the midst of a picture which boded well to earn a fortune. It was then that Laemmle turned Universal City over to Ince, with orders that he was not to be charged for the convenience. I like to think of Laemmle's benefactions to his home town in Germany, of the gifts which he made to a convent there, and of the appreciative poem composed in his honor by the sisters. Laemmle, the Jew, was also Laemmle the humanitarian. In the midst of the post-war hatred for Germany which flooded the country, I like to think of Laemmle and his *Saturday Evening Post* advertisements, urging his customers to unite with him in the aid of a stricken and bleeding Germany. His charities were not the grandiloquent gestures of a Rockefeller or a Morgan. They were personal, intimate and unstinting.

As a reviewer for a magazine which is still somewhat smaller than *The Post*, I feel that I owe a personal debt to Laemmle, for without him there would not have been room for unstifled remarks about pictures. But my debt to him and to his courage is nothing as compared to the obligation he has imposed upon every executive, every star and every writer who now waxes fat upon the product of his gigantic labors. There will come a time—and I hope it will not be long—when the impress of a producing company upon a picture will bear the authority and prestige that accompanies the impress of Harper Brothers, or Harcourt Brace & Company, Lippincott's or Scribners upon a book. The harum-scarum period will soon pass, and from it will arise a proud and honorable industry. When that time comes the name of Laemmle and Universal will be as lustrous as the greatest, and the luster will be deserved.

Fairbanks Jr. as a Star

▼▼ *CHANCES* is taken from the novel by A. Hamilton Gibbs, and the adaptation by Waldemar Young is as intelligent as anything I have seen in recent months. The story begins and ends as a motion picture, with background, atmosphere and action predominating over dialogue. One does not think "act one" as the show begins. I suspect that a generous share of this credit also should go to Alan Dwan for his direction, for save in a few spots, the story remains a motion picture throughout its length.

I have great hopes for Douglas Fairbanks Jr. His motion picture lineage is simon pure. He is not a transplanted stage star. He has been nurtured on the camera, and by careful devotion to the camera should emerge as the most consummate actor in Hollywood. His features are mobile and expressive, and although the dash of Doug Sr. is strong in his actions, there also is evident a certain high seriousness which is interesting and vastly encouraging. The story deals with the love of two brothers, Fairbanks and Anthony Bushnell, for Rose Hobart. The war interferes and the girl transfers her affection from Bushnell to Fairbanks. That poor devil Bushnell hasn't had a break for so long that I get a lump in my throat whenever I see him. I always know he is due either for death or disappointment. Rose Hobart is perfectly matched to the star. She lends a suggestion of strength and intelligence to every character she enacts, and in *Chances* she has found an ideal role.

▼▼ *Chances* is better than anything I have seen from the First National-Warner Brothers lot for a long time, and again it is so because action is a dominant factor in the story development. Travel is suggested by train wheels, bus wheels, cab wheels, motorcycle wheels, and it is suggested effectively. The war scenes, which are brief, are accomplished by a series of quick dissolves which are amazing in their completeness. There is an artillery retreat which thrilled me, and one or two exquisite shots of horse and rider illuminated against an almost pure black background. Ernest Haller is to be credited for such delightful effects.

Nevertheless I feel that the great war picture has not yet been filmed. And I feel that it will not be filmed until

some director with stark genius transplants pure insanity on the screen. I do not know how he will do it, or when. But it will be done eventually, and when the task is accomplished motion picture art will have something which will rank favorably with the best that other arts have produced.

Action

▼▼ *THE PUBLIC DEFENDER* proves once more that RKO is dealing very gingerly and very cleverly with Richard Dix. It is not permitting him to be abandoned to stereotyped roles. By maintaining the gentleman's versatility in the public eye it is increasing his reputation and enlarging his value to the studio. In *Cimarron* he was a pioneer, in *Young Donovan's Kid* he was something quite different, and in *The Public Defender* he is represented as an idle but alert young gentleman of society. His latest picture makes no pretentions to greatness, but it is excellent entertainment, and its action is maintained at a rapid speed from beginning to end. I think that not once is there a noticeable let-down in the story.

Dix is presented as "The Reckoner," an avenger of the innocent and a nemesis to that particular variety of crooks who rob their own banks and swindle orphans. Shirley Grey's father is threatened with prison as a result of a conspiracy among his directors which has wrecked his bank and thrown the blame upon his shoulders. Dix, it develops, is in love with Miss Grey. I do not blame him in the slightest for the affection, but he has a disagreeable habit of hiding it. In their endeavor to escape from sickly sentimentality I detect a concerted effort on the part of directors to cut sentiment to the bone. I hope it will not be over-emphasized, because sophisticated love is not exactly good business in the villages.

The tensest moments of *The Public Defender* are shot in silence. Dix and his colleagues, Paul Hurst and Boris Karloff, elude guards and steal manuscripts from under the nose of everybody but the state militia. And they do it in a silence which keeps the audience on edge. Even the dialogue on the outskirts of these silent shots is curtailed, so that the dramatic value does not sag too abruptly. The camera tells most of the story, for which Director J. Walter Ruben is to be felicitated, and for which he will be rewarded by generous public patronage. Max Rée's settings are as usual excellent and restrained, and Carl Gerard, Frank Sheridan, Edmund Breese, Purnell Pratt and Nella Walker handle their parts in a highly satisfactory manner. *The Public Defender* is one picture that I distinctly enjoyed.

Good and Bad

▼▼ *BIG BUSINESS GIRL* is a fairly amusing and highly improbable affair about a young woman from college who vamps her boss into an excellent job, vamps her boss's best customer into a job for the boy friend and husband, and ends happily with everything solved. Accepting the story, one may enjoy it, but there are portions which will outrage many. I refer chiefly to Warner Brothers-First National-Vitaphone's insistence upon advertising the Brunswick radio. The feat was accomplished in *Gold Dust Gertie* and again in *Business Girl* one finds Brunswick grabbing a lot of footage. I am forced to wonder why the automobile, which was called the Royal Eight, was not likewise branded Cadillac or Packard. It should have been in order to justify the inclusion of Brunswick. Perhaps I am an exception, but I become highly indignant at such crudity.

▼▼ BUT TO COMPENSATE in part for this mistake, there is at least one delightful sound effect. A newspaper excerpt announcing the departure of the hero and heroine is flashed on the screen, and while the audience reads it, the sound of a train bell conveys the suggestion of travel. While I still was chuckling with happiness at this inclusion, I was brought sharply to reality by the bad tempo of Frank Albertson as an orchestra director. Albertson is a charming actor, and carried his big boy role with considerable success, but as an orchestra leader he is like nothing that was ever seen on earth or over the earth or under the earth. Ricardo Cortez shared masculine honors with Albertson, but the performance of Miss Joan Blondell as the professional co-respondent struck me harder than anything else in the picture.

The direction of William A. Seiter is brilliant in spots, and considering the story material he may be forgiven for those portions which are not so brilliant. Although Miss Loretta Young is absolutely devastating—perhaps the most beautiful young woman on the screen—I am not yet convinced that she is a completely finished actress. But as far as that goes, she doesn't have to be. Better stories would help her. For summer fare *Big Business Girl* is probably good entertainment, although I didn't believe a bit of it.

All for a Woman

▼▼ *THREE WHO LOVED* is a serious drama which is effective but not memorable. The story is an interesting one, and Conrad Nagel, Robert Ames and Betty Compson, who never turn in bad performances, are included in the cast. George Archainbaud directs capably enough, but there is too much conversation. The picture begins with talk and ends with talk, and the cessation between beginning and end is hardly noticeable. It is a welcome relief from current pictures because it is utterly unsophisticated. The characters do not have a particularly easy moral standard, and their difficulties become genuine and interesting. Conrad Nagel and Robert Ames are bank clerks when Betty Compson arrives fresh from Sweden to marry Nagel. While her future husband keeps his nose in law books the young lady falls in love with Ames, who gives us an excellent interpretation of a trifler. Nagel steals from the bank, Ames is blamed and goes to prison, and the resulting complications,

during which Betty marries Nagel, are a trifle complex and considerably more absorbing than one usually finds.

Frankly I enjoy a story which permits me to meditate as much about the plot as about the players. The reason why characters act as they do is more interesting to me than the pure technic of their actions. But perhaps in this preference I do not reflect a popular attitude. However that may be, I feel that whatever virtues *Three Who Loved* possesses are virtues of the story rather than virtues of action or of direction. I thought Nagel a fool for marrying the girl, Miss Compson, a treacherous little package for falling in love with Ames, and Ames a complete bounder, although a rather likeable one. I must therefore conclude that a picture which forced me to think in such terms is a very fair show.

Max Rée handled the settings, and his boarding house is excellent. Whether he is dealing in mansions or kitchen doors, Rée never exaggerates. The de Mille idea is utterly foreign to him, and he is cognizant of the fact that people are exactly equal to those things with which they surround themselves. If there had been less dialogue, more action and a little less Betty Compson, *Three Who Loved* would have been a better picture and a bigger money maker.

A Puzzle

▼▼ *THE NIGHT ANGEL.* Before viewing this picture I did something that is not my usual procedure. I read other reviews about it. All were rather frightful. Someone suggested that the title should have been *Night Mare.* Other remarks were equally dubious. I was disappointed because I thought *Night Angel* one of the best titles to come out of Hollywood in a long while. A picture with such a title, I reasoned, could not be absolutely wet. So I went with misgivings and I returned with a thankful heart, because I liked it. It is a writer-director affair, with Edmund Goulding at the helm. And whatever its faults, it shows considerably more director-sympathy than the usual tale which goes through at least five hands before the script is ready. This writer-director combination is something that will become more frequent, and when it does we will have better pictures.

There is something wrong with me, I think. I am too sympathetic. I can glimpse behind the rocky points of a sincere cinematic effort something of the care and aspirations that are bound up in it. Moreover I attend a showing not as a critic, but as a spectator seeking amusement. I endeavor to grant the players their situation, and to throw myself into their story. As an audience of one, it is good business for me to do so, because I have paid money for amusement, and I am going to make conditions as favorable as possible in order that I may derive all the entertainment value that the picture holds. Possibly that is why I liked *Night Angel.*

▼▼ Fredric March and Nancy Carroll hold the spot in this Paramount picture. March and Leslie Howard are two of the most fascinating gentlemen on the screen, and no picture in which they appear is utterly bad. Miss Carroll faltered badly in the opening sequences, but as the story unfolded she improved, and in the latter half I thought her work excellent. The setting of the story is rather vague, but anyhow it is foreign. March is a young prosecutor and Miss Carroll is the daughter of a countess of dubious reputation who maintains a dive and does small jobs of petty theft on the side. When the countess is arrested March prosecutes her, and his love affair with the daughter starts at the trial. If such a proceeding be termed illogical, I can point out several instances in life where cultured gentlemen have fallen for such shoddy little intellectual tramps as Miss Carroll's part portrayed.

The picture is slow, but I didn't mind the deliberate tempo. Its settings are beautiful in a time when drabness on the screen is getting to be a common fault. The photography is more than satisfactory. Distinctly *Night Angel* is not a photographed play, but neither is it completely a motion picture. Slow tempo, weak story, dialogue notwithstanding, there is something about the picture that places it rather high on the list of shows I review in this number. But even that may not mean a great deal.

Spiced to Taste

▼▼ *THE MAN IN POSSESSION* belongs entirely to as charming a pair as may be found anywhere on the screen—Robert Montgomery and Irene Purcell. There are others, certainly, but the audience hangs upon the entrance of the two stars, together with C. Aubrey Smith, than whom there is no more theatrical English gentleman. Reginald Owen as Montgomery's brother gives us a performance which is a little exaggerated, and Beryl Mercer has been given so many moaning mother parts that I am a little afraid she will faint whenever she appears on the screen. Sam Wood directs, and achieves a laugh in every sequence. Not a guffaw, mind you, but a quiet laugh that is always the response to cleverness and wit.

I confess that I am somewhat troubled by this M-G-M picture. It is filled with dialogue, yet I enjoyed it from end to end. There are, of course, a few scenes in which action is predominant, such as that soup spilling affair, and at no time does the action cease entirely. But fundamentally the thing is a play, and it is perhaps because it is so obviously a play that I can not condemn it as a motion picture. Nor do I have the slightest idea how the cleverness of *The Man in Possession* could have been attained, let us say, in complete silence. It is something like *Rebound* in this respect, a very witty play transposed to the screen. Its sparkle can not fail to attract, but it will be quite another thing when the picture goes through Kansas. If its small town billings are completely successful, I shall miss a guess.

Miss Purcell improves with each performance. Her work in this latest endeavor can not be compared with her char-

acterization of the young heroine in *Just a Gigolo*. She is immeasurably above Haines, and when she travels with Montgomery she is in her own company. She has the same strength that Rose Hobart possesses, but her beauty is of a more scintillant variety. Miss Hobart's loveliness is that of repose, assurance and serenity. Miss Purcell suggests a lively and sophisticated charm. Call me silly if you will, I think that the Purcell lips form words more beautifully than any other lips in Christendom. And I think the Montgomery smile is a perfect complement to them.

Intelligent Sound

▼▼ *WILD HORSE* is produced for an audience that distinctly does not desire mauve drawing rooms and sophisticated speech. It is a fairly successful western adapted by Jack Natteford from a weak story by Peter B. Kyne. It relates the adventures of Mr. Hoot Gibson on a rodeo ranch, the capture of a wild horse, a murder by villain Edmund Cobb, and the eventual triumph of Hoot over horses and villains, in the arms of Alberta Vaughn. Stepin Fetchit does a negro ranch boy quite effectively, although there is a little too much of him. Richard Thorpe and Sidney Algier directed, and together with L. E. Tope worked out sound effects more perfectly than any yet made by the super-super-super producers.

Dialogue mercifully is limited and the camera travels far and wide in its pursuit of the actors. I think of no scene handled so effectively as the sequence wherein Gibson, entering his cabin, discovers the body of his crony, "Skeeter Bill" Robinson. It is a hot mountain afternoon with sunlight carving a bright trail through the room. Gibson opens the door and looks into the cabin. From outside the songs of birds seep into the room. Not a burst of song, but rather the subdued twittering that mountain birds use in carrying on late afternoon gossip. Gibson leans on the door and it squeaks, not raucously, but faintly. The birds and the groaning door are the first completely effective sound effects I have heard.

There are several reasons why *Wild Horse* should be successful with the audience at which it is aimed. Gibson still is a drawing card with the kids—as well as a not inconsiderable body of adults—and there are so few pictures to which healthy normal children may go and be thrilled, that their nickles and dimes should be deposited generously at the box-office to witness this one. Then again, I imagine that Allied Productions will begin to cash in on profits quite early, because they have not spent nine million dollars to produce their picture. And finally there is a glorious fight between a wild stallion and a civilized specimen which had me almost gasping.

Murnau's Parting Gift

▼▼ *TABU*. For sheer loveliness of conception and beauty of execution I can think of nothing finer in recent pictures than this final effort of the gifted German director who will make no more pictures. And it held the interest of a rather large house, which is something more remarkable when it is considered that it contains neither dialogue nor box-office names in the cast, and that the story theme is anything but new. I do not know how *Tabu* is faring at the financial end, but I am willing to wager that it is not losing money. Regardless of the cash, it should make other directors and producers wonder what might be accomplished in a picture similarly treated, having the immense advantage of players known to the public. Nor does this mean that I think anyone in Hollywood could have handled the characterizations as competently as these half-cast Mongolians and Islanders. Their work is sincere and touching, and they speak in a language that transcends race and nationality. It is the language of pantomime.

Some mention should be made, I think, of the story. I do not remember the names of the fictional characters, but there are a girl and a boy who are in love, and an emissary from the island ruler who selects the girl as a bride to the gods. The lovers escape from the island, only to be discovered, and the ancient priest takes the girl. Her lover follows her, swimming through moonlit seas until he reaches the boat. He grasps a rope and is about to climb aboard, when the priest snips the line, and he is lost. The final sequences of the picture follow his losing battle against the waters. The music pants with his exertions and wails to the despair that is in his heart. Presently he disappears and the story is told.

The photography by Floyd Crosby is magnificent, and the musical arrangement by Hugo Riesenfeld adds more to the story than the entire contents of Webster's Unabridged could have done. There are a few native songs done in chorus, but aside from them voices are not heard. The orchestra, charmingly imitates the calls and shouts of the islanders. Here is screen art, but it is more than that. It is a promise of what may be done with silent pictures and a sympathetically synchronized musical score. It is, perhaps, of no significance that the proper interment of Murnau's body in Germany awaits the proceeds from his last picture.

Amusing Comedy

▼▼ THE GIRL HABIT embarrassed me somewhat because I laughed almost indecently when the rest of the audience was silent. It is an old failing of mine, considerably aggravated in this instance by the clever work of Charles Ruggles. When I am in sympathy with a comedian he can tie me into knots, and I was thoroughly in sympathy with Ruggles. He plays the part of an ideal softie whom the dear ladies victimize at every opportunity. His connections with a gangster's wife embroil him in difficulties which threaten to cut short his gay and amiable days, and the eventual solution, which of course is happy and inconsistent, finds the true villain punished, and Mr. Ruggles in undisputed possession of Sue Conroy.

Particularly impressive were those sequences shot in almost total silence. Ruggles' marches surrounded by gangsters

intent upon his destruction, were amusing, and held the audience better than any other scene in the picture. The story afforded a wealth of opportunity for more of this, with its chases and duckings, but it is adapted from a play, so naturally there was a great deal of unnecessary dialogue. But there is less than usual cause for complaint, because the camera travels after the players rather well, and the story moves ahead swiftly. Ruggles, I think, will become increasingly popular as he is given more opportunities to twist his amusing features about.

Sue Conroy, who is his beloved, has some of the charm of Hedda Hooper, but I wish the camera would be a little more careful of her profile shots. She manages to escape the staginess of Margaret Dumont, who was given a rather difficult part, and to my way of thinking slightly over-played it. Perhaps this is the fault of director Edward Cline, for I remember one sequence where Ruggles, Conroy and Dumont halted in the midst of a walk, faced the camera, and talked. People do not stop and turn left when they are talking. Nor do they group themselves. Nor do they become unnecessarily dramatic. Nor are they aware that the world is hanging upon their words.

Allen Jenkins makes a very menacing gangster, and Donald Meek as the butler amused me even though his work was stagey. Tamara Geva, I hope will be given better parts in the future. I rather think the makings of a star are concealed within her. Douglas Gilmore, Jerome Daley and Betty Garde comprised the cast of this Paramount production.

Ballyhoo Vindicated

▼▼ *FREE SOUL* is the first picture I have seen in months that justifies the tremendous uproar made at the publicity offices before release. I enjoyed it so much that I couldn't trust myself to write about it when I went home. I wanted to sleep the matter over, because no self-respecting reviewer wants to say a lot of nice things for which he is going to be sorry. But I have waited three days now, and I still think *Free Soul* is a whale of a picture. Moreover I think that Clarence Brown is one of the best, and that Miss Shearer is lovely almost beyond endurance, and that Lionel Barrymore has turned in one of the finest pieces of work to the credit of the screen. A shameful confession, in a day when everybody is panning everybody else and wondering how long the studio doors are going to remain open. But I am adamant in my beliefs.

I am informed that the story of Adela Rogers St. Johns, from which the motion picture is taken, is as sorry a mess of tripe as one might expect from a *Liberty* contributor, but on the screen it goes quite well. It relates the story of a girl suckled on the modern theory of complete freedom, privileged to follow the dictates of her heart and passion, learning only from mistakes, and regretful for nothing. But like most theories modern or ancient, it proves to be the veriest tosh. The girl runs amok with a gangster, somebody is killed, and her father is ruined by the very ideas he has inculcated in his daughter. Clarence Brown handles the story deftly and with good taste, and there is a solid ring of logic about the affair that convinces.

Lionel Barrymore is always expected to turn in a capital performance, but in *Free Soul* his work is something more than capital. The affection existing between Shearer and Barrymore as daughter and father is something fine and clean, for all the sorry climax it induces. Barrymore's court scene is gripping, and only now does it occur to me that it was perhaps a little over dramatic. Clark Gable is one gangster who is portrayed as a rat, is a rat, and dies like a rat. There is little audience sympathy with him, which is something unusual in a day when gangsters are demigods with a gallery following every move. Leslie Howard is consummately fine in a part which is far too small.

I like the way Miss Shearer bandied about such words as "gosh" and "darn." And I like her freedom from stage accent. And from the depths of my abysmal ignorance I should like to inquire from where comes that startling line which reads ". . . the moonbeams turned to worms . . . and crawled away." Is it possible that St. Johns has written it? Or is it a quotation that every literate man should know? Anyhow it struck me in the face and I shall not soon forget it. In the face of a dismal summer I welcome *Free Soul* and hope it plays for three years and makes enough money to retire the national debt. M-G-M can be forgiven half a dozen poor pictures for this one.

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Beyond the Blue Horizon

By Monitor

TO THE EDITOR:

It takes an enviable degree of courage to publish an editorial of the nature of the one which appeared under the heading *If Wall Street Knew* in the *Spectator* of June 6th. Even those who disliked it most must concede that. Not every mortal is endowed with the guts to throw a glove to the gods!

I suppose it's a fair thing to regard you as the ranking motion picture critic in America, since the most intelligent periodicals in this country have commissioned your opinion when they sought authority in terms of the cinema; but if you hold yourself up as knowing how to make a sound picture while the whole of Hollywood blunders about in abysmal ignorance of the subject, you are abandoning that role. After such a defiance, it would be a mere waste of time to continue criticising the efforts of those who "wouldn't know one if they saw it." To make good your boast you must now tell them what a picture is, and how it should be manufactured. So far you have done neither of these things!

I think you've given yourself a devil of a job. You're quite sure you know what's wrong with the present method of production; you understand the theoretic possibilities of a sound picture; nevertheless, I am somewhat skeptical that you can tell the industry how to achieve them.

The present débacle, you contend, is due to the fact that production executives have no understanding of the medium in which they work, and that their policies are regulated without regard to it. The public has become fed up with mere animated radio programmes and will pay for no more of them!

▼▼ WHETHER YOU are right or wrong from the box-office angle, I don't know and don't care; but what you say about the mis-employment of the medium is quite clearly evidenced by the selection of stories for production, and (more especially) by the method in which they are adapted for the screen: Stories are purchased and produced although they contain no possible cinema material—an outstanding example in point may be noted on Paramount's advance announcement list! Scripts are prepared by writers who have no knowledge of camera technic, and inevitably comprise pure literary or literary-dramatic forms which are sustained upon, or devoted to, the exploitation of dialogue.

The outcome of this absurdity has been disastrous in terms of the cinema quality of present day films: In the production of a sound picture the camera is nailed to the script; because of the exactions of dialogue, it can move only when the printed page permits it to do so, and then only in the specified direction; consequently, it has ceased to be an emotional medium. The director is not to be blamed for this; so long as the script form remains literary, the camera must remain a mere mirror, angled or traversed occasionally for the sake of variety, but without other significance in itself. This is no issue of art or esthetics! It's as commonplace a thing as complaining that a job is being done with pick and spade when there's a steamshovel standing idle.

▼▼ THERE SHOULD be no occasion to have to argue the point that the *Camera* must contribute the dramatic quality to a motion picture: In the essential nature of the cinema, it is the means by which the emotional values of a story are to be conveyed to an audience. It is a far more potent dramatic factor than the acting or the actors; it is of infinitely more consequence than the dialogue; it is to a picture what singing is to opera—the only possible justification for existence. Therefore, if the camera is to be disregarded as a medium in the preparation of a script, why bother to shoot the script? It will be just as complete over the radio.

There are two distinct methods of employing a camera,—an objective and subjective technic. Each of these is totally dependent upon building definite successions of scenes to produce a desired feeling or emotion in an audience. Then how can a script be prepared for shooting by a writer who has never even heard of such things? Especially as under the present method of production he is responsible for what was formerly the director's most important province—the exploitation of the camera as a medium? This is not an overstatement of the actual facts. In silent picture days the script was a mere memorandum of the action to be shot; it put no limitations on the director's method of telling the story with his camera—provided the marines arrived in time to frustrate the inevitable assault-with-intent in the last reel. It was usually written in a language which the director could not read—a touch of pure genius.

▼▼ THE TOO obvious fact is that a script must be prepared for the camera and not for the players: It must permit the camera to convey the story to the audience, instead of having the actors recite it with gestures. And the only way to achieve this, is to have the script prepared by someone who has not only a sense of literary and cinema values, but also an intimate understanding of the director's methods and camera technic. A perfect script for Von Sternberg should be worse than useless for Lewis Milestone, and vice versa.

The fault of the present method of production is not in an excessive use of dialogue; it lies exclusively in the lack of employment of the camera as a dramatic medium. The amount of dialogue which a perfect picture will contain may well be just as much as is now used. *Put down that brick, Mr. Beaton!* I will also admit it may be none at all. Each picture will make its own rule, quite correctly, in that regard—if the camera is employed as a medium. Excessive dialogue is not the error, but it is the direct consequence of the error.

Now, sir, it is a simple and pleasant thing for me to sit at my window among the tree-tops and write these paragraphs, agreeing with you that they demonstrate the fundamental ignorance of those who make films. No doubt an uninitiated reader might feel the last word has been spoken, and that Mr. Thalberg can now dash off and make the world's first fine sound picture. But you and I know better, Mr. Beaton! We know the real problem only now confronts us on its merit. You think you can solve it? Then let me state it for you!

▼▼ A SOUND picture is made by attempting to employ two distinct mediums as a single entity. The first of these, the camera, is essentially a thing of illusion, carrying with it a spontaneous subconscious acceptance of the illusion on the part of every human being. The second, in the main the human voice, is the acme of all reality, insistent upon that quality in everything around it. Each of these mediums is complete in itself; consequently they overlap and make incongruous demands on every situation to be presented on a screen. How are they to be combined in employment? Certainly not by excluding one of them occasionally at the expense of the other! Certainly not by subduing one in favor of the other, as the camera is now stultified in favor of dialogue! Then what is the answer, Mr. Beaton? Do you know? You will not be permitted by the public to cut the Gordian knot with the knife of silence. Chaplin's last picture should convince you of that.

There is an answer: What you are shrieking for has actually been accomplished—but only in a single sequence. When Lubitsch made a railroad train, a girl, a countryside, and an audience sing a song together, he proved it—and how! Perhaps it wasn't even a perfect sequence: The close-up of Miss MacDonald (the last important and the only stationary material to be exploited) was a bad mistake; the long parallel lines of peasantry in the hay fields (designed to accelerate a sense of the forward rush of the train) was not a successful device, as the severe mathematical formation and lack of perspectives made the audience visually conscious and so failed to produce the desired physical reflex. A resort to the Russian method of progressive quick-cutting might have saved it, however. But these were trivial errors in mere brush work. Behind this sequence lay the first correct conception and exploitation of the sound picture medium. Camera, sound, and the human voice each contributed to their maximum dramatic effectiveness. An enormous achievement!—surpassing even Chaplin's contribution to the cinema in his direction of *A Woman of Paris*.

So, if you wish a solution to the problem you have set yourself, you need not go *Beyond the Blue Horizon*. Take what you find there and tell us how to apply it in other directions. Gather all the experts of Hollywood to lecture on sound picture technic, if you must! But gather them under a single hat. It will afford space for all of them, provided the initials on its band are E. L.

Reviewed In This Number

BRANDED—

A Columbia picture. Directed by D. Ross Lederman; story, adaptation and dialogue by Randall Faye; photographed by Benjamin Kline; recording engineer, George Cooper, assistant director, Mack Wright; film editor, Gene Milford.

The cast: Buck Jones, Ethel Kenyon, Philo McCullough, Wallace MacDonald, Al Smith, John Oscar, Clark Burroughs, Fred Burns.

FREE SOUL—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Clarence Brown; from the book by Adela Rogers St. Johns; adaptation by Becky Gardiner; dialogue continuity by John Meehan; photographer, William Daniels, recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; gowns by Adrian; film editor, Hugh Wynn.

The cast: Norma Shearer, Leslie Howard, Lionel Barrymore, Clark Gable, James Gleason, Lucy Beaumont.

GIRL HABIT—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Edward Cline; based upon a play by A. E. Thomas and Clayton Hamilton; screen play by Owen David and Gertrude Purcell; photographed by Larry Williams.

The cast: Charlie Ruggles, Tamara Geva, Sue Conroy, Margaret Dumont, Allen Jenkins, Donald Meek, Douglas Gilmore, Jerome Daley, Betty Garde.

MAN IN POSSESSION—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Sam Wood; from the play by H. M. Harwood; screen adaptation by Sarah Y. Mason; additional dialogue by Sarah Y. Mason and P. G. Wodehouse; photographed by Oliver T. Marsh; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; gowns by Adrian; film editor, Ben Lewis.

The cast: Robert Montgomery, Charlotte Greenwood, Irene Purcell, C. Aubrey Smith, Beryl Mercer, Reginald Owen, Alan Mowbray, Maude Eburne, Forrester Harvey, Yorke Sherwood.

NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture; a Cosmopolitan production. Directed by W. S. Van Dyke; from the story by Peter B. Kyne; dialogue continuity by Edwin Justus Mayer; additional dialogue by Ruth Cummings and John Lynch; *Islands of Love* by Arthur Freed; photographed by Merritt B. Gerstad; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; wardrobe by René Hubert; film editor, Ben Lewis.

The cast: Leslie Howard, Conchita Montenegro, C. Aubrey Smith, Karen Morley, Mitchell Lewis, Hale Hamilton, Clyde Cook, Bob Gilbert, Joan Standing, Eulalie Jensen.

NIGHT ANGEL—

A Paramount picture. Written and directed by Edmund Goulding; photographed by William Steiner.

The cast: Nancy Carroll, Fredric March, Phoebe Foster, Alison Skipworth, Alan Hale.

PUBLIC DEFENDER—

A Radio picture. Directed by J. Walter Ruben; from the novel by George Goodchild; screen version and dialogue by Bernard Schubert; associate producer, Louis Sarecky; art director, Max Rée; assistant director, James Anderson; photographed by Edward Cronjager; film editor, Archie Marshek.

The cast: Richard Dix, Shirley Grey, Edmund Breese, Paul Hurst, Purnell Pratt, Alan Roscoe, Boris Karloff, Ruth Weston, Nella Walker, William Halligan, Frank Sheridan, Carl Gerard.

SIX CYLINDER LOVE—

A Fox picture. Directed by Thornton Freeland; from the play by William Anthony McGuire; adaptation and dialogue by William Conselman and Norman Houston; dialogue director, Norman Houston; chief cameraman, Ernest Palmer; chief recording engineer, Eugene Grossman; assistant director, Sam Wurtzel; settings by Duncan Cramer; costumes by Sophie Wachner.

The cast: Spencer Tracy, Edward Everett Horton, Sidney Fox, William Collier, Sr., Una Merkel, Lorin Raker, William Holden, Ruth Warren, Bert Roach.

TABU—

A Paramount release; a Murnau-Flaherty production; directed by F. W. Murnau; story by F. W. Murnau and R. J. Flaherty; photographed by Floyd Crosby; musical setting by Hugo Riesenfeld; recorded on R. C. A. Photophone.

The cast: Matahi, Reri, Hitu, Jean, Jules, King Ah.

THREE WHO LOVED—

A Radio picture. Directed by George Archainbaud; story by Martin Flavin; adaptation, continuity and dialogue by Beulah Marie Dix; photographed by Nick Musuraca; recording engineer, Clem Portman, art director, Max Rée, assistant director, Tommy Atkins.

The cast: Betty Compson, Conrad Nagel, Robert Ames, Robert Emmett O'Connor, Bodil Rosing, Dickie Moore.

WILD HORSE—

An Allied picture. Directed by Richard Thorpe and Sidney Algier; produced by M. H. Hoffman, Jr.; from a story by Peter B. Kyne; screen play by Jack Natteford; photographed by Ernest Miller; R. C. A. recording by L. E. Tope; film editor, Mildred Johnston.

The cast: Hoot Gibson, Alberta Vaughn, Stepin Fetchit, "Skeeter Bill" Robinson, George Bunny, Edward Peil, Edmund Cobb, Neal Hart, Joe Rickson, Fred Gilman.

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Welford Beaton
EDITOR
Robert E. Sherwood
ASSOCIATE

HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

AUGUST 29, 1931

Unit Production Is Industry's Way Out

Sherwood Bids Farewell To Hollywood

Presenting Evidence of Midsummer Madness

Frank Tuttle Writes a Personal Letter

Reviewed in This Number

SILENCE
BAD GIRL
LE MILLION
BLACK CAMEL
COMMON LAW
SON OF INDIA
MAGNIFICENT LIE
HUCKLEBERRY FINN
MURDER BY THE CLOCK

POLITICS
THE VIKING
HUSH MONEY
NIGHT ANGEL
NIGHT NURSE
RECKLESS HOUR
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CHILDREN OF DREAMS

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WILLIAM K. HOWARD

"TRANSATLANTIC"

Fox Film Corporation

The Editor's Views

Unit Production

BANKRUPTCY VERY nearly has been the price that the motion picture industry was called upon to pay for its demonstration of the great truth that screen entertainment can not be turned out by factory methods. Since the world began there never has lived in it a man who could handle intelligently as a producer as many as eight pictures in one year, yet we have some producers who make a bluff at handling nearly eighty. As an art the screen was powerful enough to succeed financially in spite of the terrific manhandling it received from those who acquired control of it; it was able to pay enormous

salaries to those who did not earn them, and to squander money outrageously on extravagances due to executive stupidity.

But the good old gold-spattered days are over. Pictures are getting down to cases. They are going to continue to make a lot of people wealthy, but they will be people with picture brains. Anyone with an executive mind, common sense and ordinary business training, can run a studio. He never will be a man who can make a motion picture, for the brains that equip him to produce artistic creations would not function also in a business way. We rapidly are approaching the time when the chief occupation of the film executive will be to see that the creative artist is not worried about anything. Only Hollywood knows what a complete revolution that will be. At the present time film executives with malignant persistency worry those upon whose brains they must depend for salable product.

▼▼ THE RECOGNITION of the value of individual effort will lead to unit production, wherein lies the industry's only hope of a return of prosperity. Both artistically and economically it is the only way out for Hollywood. It will permit creative brains to function and it will rid pictures of the terrific overhead that consists principally of the most wildly absurd salaries that any industry ever has been crazy enough to pay. Its coming will be opposed by those who now run the big studios, but such opposition makes it no less inevitable. The only thing that will put an end to the box-office depression is the response of the public to the quality of the pictures; the public has registered that it does not like the present product, and there will be no other response until the product is changed.

All the big releasing organizations already are looking for pictures, no matter where or by whom made. Paramount, under the terrific strain of scores of picture houses in the red, will release anything that indicates box-office strength, and it is the same way with the others. All this is hastening the day of universal unit production. For the first time in the history of the film industry it is thinking wholly in terms of pictures. In previous years the public would accept almost anything; New York executives devoted their attention to jockeying one another out of chains of theatres, and proceeded on the assumption that anyone could make their pictures. But now they are thinking differently. They understand that there is nothing else of quite such importance as the product.

▼▼ FOR PERHAPS the first time in any industry, the follies of film producers are going to react favorably to themselves. By making it practically impossible for good directors to make

pictures, they are bringing on a rebellion that will react to their own benefit. The best directors, smarting under incompetent supervision, limited as to expense and shooting schedules and

WELFORD BEATON, EDITOR VOL. 12, NO. 6 ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, ASSOCIATE
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having no word in the selection of stories, are refusing to renew their contracts with the big studios and are planning to make their own pictures. The first combination to be announced is that of Lewis Milestone and David Selznick. There will be many more. I know of at least half a dozen. There is ample capital available for this independent production. If I would abuse confidences reposed in me I could give some interesting details.

The most efficient combination will be that of the writer and director. Such combinations are being formed. Some weeks ago I suggested as a solution of the story problem, that producers should buy only motion pictures on paper instead of stories in their original form. It looks as if the spread of the unit-production idea would result in the studios buying actual motion pictures on film. A writer-director combination will contract with a studio to deliver a motion picture which will be made in the studio, with the studio having nothing to say except in the approval of the story, but not its treatment, and the size of the production budget. Acceptance of this plan of production can be forced on the studios, for in a short time the best picture brains will refuse to function along any other lines.

▼▼ THE FATE of the industry rests on not more than two score directors and as many writers. They are finding present conditions intolerable and many of them refuse any longer to be hampered in their work by nagging and ignorant supervision under which it is impossible for them to turn out pictures that are worthy of them. Suppose all of them cut themselves loose from the studios. The industry could not survive without them and would be forced to finance them in making their own pictures. The best directors and writers are aware of this, and are going to take advantage of it as their contracts expire. It will not be long before directors and writers under contract to studios will be only the poor worms who rather would be oppressed than hungry.

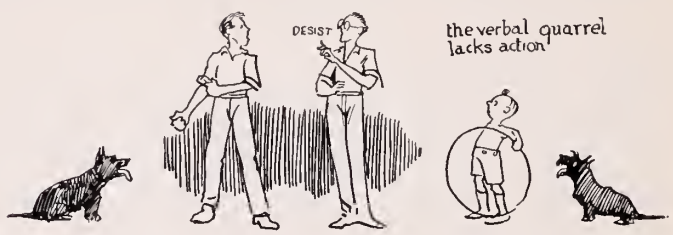
There is no group of men in pictures strong enough to prevent the screen ultimately achieving its destiny. The inexorable demand of the public for film entertainment that it will accept is the strongest force the screen ever has encountered. The present revolution is sweeping on in spite of the efforts of little fellows to stem it. It is stronger than any resistance that it can meet. During all the years that I have been hammering away at the industry I never have lost faith in the screen itself. I always have been an optimist. The emancipation of pictures is at hand.

In closing, will the congregation kindly join in a prayer of thanksgiving?

Dialogue and Talking

PRODUCERS ARE not going to get anywhere in their efforts to improve box-office conditions until they acquire a better understanding of the cause of the present slump. They agree that their product has talked itself to death and have issued orders to their screen writers to eliminate dialogue and provide for more action. As very few writers are acquainted with the fundamentals of screen art, the producers' orders most likely will fail to achieve the end desired. The first thing that writers must understand is that there is a difference between dialogue, as we use the term, and talking. The public does not object to talking on the screen; and it was not talking, as such, that caused the box-office depression, consequently it is not talking in itself that must be avoided. Let me see if I can make myself clear.

We will take a quarrel scene. It can be made either verbal or physical. In the first instance the men face one another and have it out in words, the prevailing talkie treatment. This makes it necessary for the audience to use its aural sense, to listen to what the characters are saying and to judge of the progress of the quarrel by the strength of the abusive terms



that are exchanged. It is this treatment that has driven people from picture houses. The screen is a visual art, and pictures will prove popular to the extent that they appeal to the visual sense. Reduced to its fundamentals, dialogue has not become unpopular because it is dialogue, but because it entails on an audience the necessity of employing wholly a sense that should not be employed objectively when screen entertainment is being viewed.

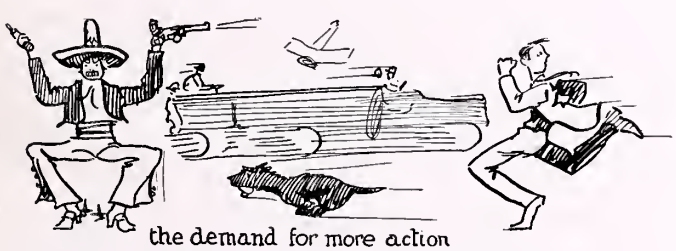
▼▼ IF THE QUARREL is made a physical combat, the audience can employ its visual sense in following its progress. While they are fighting, the characters can talk as much as they like, can keep up a running exchange of epithets and keep their tongues as busy as their arms without lessening the status of the scene as an example of legitimate motion picture technic, the kind of technic that established the vast screen audience in the first place and which would re-establish it if it became again the major element in screen entertainment. The audience follows the progress of the fight with its eyes and even incessant talking by the parties to it merely becomes sound effect which bears the same relation to the scene as the accompanying music would have born in the days of silent pictures. This kind of talking—I would not call it dialogue—becomes a necessary element of the scene, again as the music used to be, as an agency to heighten the illusion of reality.

The danger that lies in an arbitrary order that talking must be eliminated is that, deprived of music and enjoined from the use of talking as a sound effect, writers will find it impossible to give full values to their scenes. As I pointed out in the last *Spectator*, to order the elimination of dialogue is to apply the wrong remedy to the existing sickness of the screen. The order should be to employ the camera in telling a story on the screen and to cease telling it with dialogue. If the audience is given an opportunity to follow the story with its eyes, it can employ its aural sense in listening subjectively to as much chatter as can be written into a script and there will be no protest.

▼▼ THE FIRST STEP that must be taken towards the rehabilitation of the financial structure of motion pictures is the return to first principles by the employment of music as a subjective aid to the assimilation by the audience of what is offered on the screen. With the gradual return of the camera as the principal story-telling medium—something that the *Spectator* has been urging for three years and the wisdom of which producers only now are recognizing—synchronized scores will become imperative. The more the camera is relied upon, the more silent scenes will there be in pictures, and it is hard to make impressive a scene that is shown in absolute silence. Then, too, if we have synchronized scores, the incidental chatter that would make my fight scene more impressive, could be eliminated without producing the flatness that characterizes a silent scene in a talking picture, as the music would serve as a substitute for it.

Another consideration that makes imperative the universal adoption of synchronized scores as a part of screen entertainment, if we are to have less dialogue that the audience is forced to listen to, is the fact that the musical accompaniment will make it unnecessary for us to hear a great deal of incidental talking that is necessary to set scenes, but which does not play a part in telling the story. When there is no other sound coming to us from the screen, we feel that we must hear even the sweet nothings that the parties to a love scene breathe to one another; but if there were a musical accompaniment, we would be satisfied with merely viewing the scene without hearing what the characters were saying. The music, therefore, would make shooting easier as no attention would have to be paid to the dialogue in such scenes and no retakes of these scenes would be necessary because of flaws in the reading of lines. And much less dialogue would have to be written.

▼▼ PRODUCERS TELL their writers that more action must be written into the scripts. Are they sure that their writers know what action is? Do they know themselves? I don't think they do. If we can judge from what we see on the screen,



the demand for more action

the impression prevails that moving the characters about a room while the story is being told in dialogue is the proper method of applying action to talkie scenes. Anything moving on the screen is regarded as action. It isn't. When what is being said in a scene is the matter of paramount importance to the audience, as it is in the majority of scenes in a dialogue picture, physical motion serves only to retard the real motion by distracting the attention of the audience from the matter of major interest. Such scenes would have more motion if the characters remained still while reading their lines.

When we mention action in dealing with motion pictures, we do not mean physical action. In the successful picture every element must contribute to the one indispensable quality—the uninterrupted flow of filmic motion, the smooth progression of story interest. In a scene we see a man standing outside the room in which his wife is undergoing a serious operation. He is tense, rigidly still, his careworn face set as if carved in marble. Through such a scene the filmic motion progresses swiftly, much more swiftly than it would if he paced the corridor restlessly, waved his arms and tore his hair. Such physical motion would serve only to retard the filmic motion. Yet it is safe to say that in an effort to comply with the demand for more action, the majority of screen writers would consider they were doing it by making our suffering husband go through a routine of calisthenics of grief.

Producers have many things that worry them: the lessening of dialogue, the increase of action, the proper place of music in screen entertainment, the trend of public taste, and other things that put wrinkles in the brows of our film barons. There is one order that they might issue that would settle all the troubles that beset them if they have in their employ people sufficiently intelligent to understand it and to carry it out—a terse order to their writers and directors:

Learn your medium!

Noise and Dreams

ON MY WAY back from downtown Los Angeles I was held up at Seventh and Broadway while a screeching ambulance went by. I plowed through traffic to Wilshire and Western where a police car screamed its way across my path; then on to La Brea where my ears were assailed by the shrieks of an hysterical fire engine. More traffic . . . . its smells . . . . noises of all sorts . . . . unintelligible croaking of hoarse newsboys following me all the way. At Fairfax and Wilshire two cars collide. Farther on I pass a traffic policeman giving a ticket to a scared young girl. In Beverly Hills a woman signals for a right hand turn and turns left, and squirts hatred at me from her eyes when my brakes lock and I skid to her side. An advertising car emitting terrible music . . . a dead animal in the roadway . . . . a speeding car misses me by

In The Next Spectator

We believe that it will be worth your while to read the next *Spectator*. The Editor, striving manfully not to repeat himself, surveys the present situation and presents some further arguments in favor of unit production. He also contends again that the story is not as important as the treatment accorded it. He devotes an article to the difference between physical action on the screen and filmic motion. He comments on other matters and reviews several pictures.

Mr. Sherwood always can be counted upon to appeal to both the sense of humor and the intelligence of *Spectator* readers. Mr. Trumbo will present some terse remarks and review ten or a dozen pictures.

Among the reviews that will appear in the next issue will be those of the following pictures:

Bought	***Silence***
Skyline	***Street Scene***
Transatlantic	***Sporting Blood***
The Great Lover	***Merely Mary Ann***
Monkey Business	***The Bad Hombre***
The Age for Love	***Football for the Fan***
An American Tragedy	***Women Go On Forever***

Secrets of a Secretary

inches as I cross an intersection . . . . a battered Ford parked in front of my garage when I reach home . . . .

Just an ordinary motor trip . . . . an ordinary day . . . . ordinary conditions. Only difference is that this time I noticed things. And I thought of how we live . . . . Millions of us scattered over yesterday's desert . . . . dwellings on hillsides that we twist up grades to reach . . . . clamorous, discordant street cars . . . . jammed sidewalks . . . . streets that would be tunnels if they had roofs . . . . smells everywhere . . . .

restless, nervous speed . . . . crimes . . . . constant annoyances . . . . daily papers . . . . silly people who imagine they are important . . . . something the matter with the car . . . .

▼▼ AND I WONDERED if somewhere in the world there still is a sawmill beside a tranquil river . . . . a lumber yard with its clean smells, where boys gather on sunny Sunday afternoons and exchange ambitions . . . . village streets, tree-shaded, with baby carriages, dogs, and unexcited people . . . . a meadow sloping to a creek that sings songs to the accompaniment of music played on the rocky keyboard in its depths . . . . a pool, darkened by branches that look at themselves in it . . . . perhaps a trout to justify one's patience in casting . . . . a field of clover with its perfume and its bees . . . . sheep indolently nibbling their way across a great carpet . . . . a pasture with cows posed ready for painting . . . . a reaper in a field kicking up perfume of hay . . . . a little house by itself, hugged by honeysuckle and morning glories . . . . a grandmother inside putting cookies in a jar . . . . sleeping there at night . . . . mingling with the first dream, the languid tinkle of a bell as a cow moves in the barnyard.

Do they still have such things?

And has half a century made much difference in the maples in Orillia? Do the new generations of the Tudhopes, the Quinns and the Hendersons gather butternuts when they ripen in—when was it? September? October? And choke-cherries; I suppose they're still there to pucker-up mouths. Do the kids still steal apples? Every small boy, I contend, has an ethical, moral and legal right to his neighbor's apples if he can get them without being caught. How about the tanyard? Is it still there? I can't remember the name of the man who owned it. I went to school with his son. Is Lake Couchiching as peaceful, as friendly, as lovely as ever? Do the weeping willows still lean over it to bless romances that begin beneath them? Can you still walk out only a few miles and come to streams that murmur gently and offer mossy banks to the loafers whom the summer breeze, the restless leaves, the songs of birds, and the smell of nature make lazy? . . . . Are the roads still dusty—the roads which leisurely crawl up unambitious hills between rail fences that wiggle their way up the same grades as if to learn where the roads are going? And are the fields as they used to be, with meadow larks, buttercups, an oak with a tremendous spread, and near it the rotting stump of what had been a noble tree that stretched great verdured arms to God?

▼▼ I WONDER if the flower market at Nice is as soothing as it was before the world was made harsh by the war . . . . The village we found up in the Alpes Maritimes, near where France, Switzerland and Italy touch one another—the quiet of it, the ineffable peace that kept us there for four days, doing nothing magnificently . . . . The French village on a by-road, with its wedding, gorgeously floral, fascinatingly attired peasants who invited us to attend . . . . A Sunday among the tulip farms of Holland . . . . That sweet old woman in front of a farmhouse in England, the one we lied to about our car being disabled because we wanted her to ask us in for a cup of tea; and the tea, and the crumpets and the jam; the old dog who shared our feast, and the kind old eyes of the sweet old woman —her gossip—her laughter.

Is peace still part of the English landscape?

Now I'll drive dangerously all the way from the roaring beach of the Pacific to the sun-baked stand at Wrigley Field, and be one of several thousand people who will scream crazily at a ball game.

The Moon and I

HARRY CARR a few weeks ago wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* something to the effect that the greatest modern idiocy is men's attire. He should have been with me on a stroll from which I just have returned. The moon is full—I'm writing this about three weeks before it will reach you—the night is warm, the breeze gentle and the surf lazy. Naked, except for bathing trunks and a pipe, I have patrolled the beach for a mile on either side of our beach house, the hard sand affording good going and the hour providing a measure of freedom from distracting human traffic. A night for meditation,

▼▼ THE HEAD of a New York music publishing house is on the Metro payroll for the purpose of spotting songs in forthcoming productions. He "will keep in close contact with studio composers and advise on the commercial possibilities of placing songs in screen musicals." That's a staggering announcement. The first musicals were made that way. That

is why they failed. Some day Metro may become sufficiently wise to allow only people who know something about motion pictures to dictate what will be in them. That will be tough on music publishers, but will afford musicals a chance for success. Paying a New York song merchant to tell it how to make motion pictures is an idiotic idea unless Metro intends to make only idiotic musical pictures.

and I thought of what Carr had written. To-morrow it will be hot and I will go to town attired for a day of discomfort because I can not patrol Hollywood Boulevard as I have the beach. Yesterday on the golf course I saw a young giant, burnt bronze to the waist, playing along the next fairway with his shirt dangling from his trousers' top. I wish I were as brave.

Dress reform is on the way. It will be the next manifestation of the growing common sense of the human race. It will

progress so rapidly that golfers wearing only a coat of tan from the waist up, will be a usual sight on fairways and greens in a year or two. Why not? Is there a single sensible argument that can be advanced against it? There is nothing physical about modesty. It simply is a state of mind, a concession to a convention that decrees that no man is entitled to a maximum of comfort; a symbol of his cowardice, evidence of his enslavement by the dictates of society. Let society undress itself and run around naked and it would cease to be novel after the first day.

▼▼ I AM NOT a nudist. Perish the thought! But I do believe that I am a semi-nudist. The saving grace of my trunks kept me from being abashed to-night by the calm regard of the wise old moon, but my indifference to the braver breakers that came far enough up the beach to embrace my legs, and the caress of my upper body by the night's gentle breeze gave me a sense of physical exhiliration that acted as a stimulant to a feeling of utter freedom that made me shed my years and want to sing.

Women, always more sensible than men in the matter of dress, are draping their legs in wide-flowing pajamas that give them a grace they have lacked since we've seen their knees. It is the beginning of the end of skirts, the first step in the emancipation of our wives and daughters. It will restore the ankle's power to thrill us and give back to man the ability to imagine graces that garments cover. For women it will provide freedom and comfort that heretofore they have lacked the courage to acquire. And it will make them beautiful. That is the real reason the era of pajamas is upon us. The more woman revealed herself, the more uninteresting she became. Now she is going to cover herself again and her power to intrigue us will increase.

We Win a Ham

THE NIGHT was hot—it was four weeks ago—I had had eighteen holes of golf and two swims during the day, and I wanted to stay home, but I was away behind with my picture reviewing, and being the slave of you people who read the *Spectator*, I reluctantly left my porch by the moonlit sea and went to the nearest picture house that was showing something I hadn't seen. I took with me Mrs. Spectator, with whom I've been going places and seeing things for the past quarter of a century. She's a patient soul. The feature was *Night Angel*, written and directed at the Paramount eastern studio by Edmund Goulding and starring Nancy Carroll and Fredric March. I knew it was a pretty weak sister, for I had read many reviews which said so, and it has done rather poorly at the box-office.

I herewith wish to quarrel violently with all the critics who found any except the most trivial faults with Eddie's picture. In spite of my rebellious mood, I found it to be an intriguing bit of entertainment. And Mrs. Spectator agreed with me. We felt so good after viewing it that we put a dime on a number at an Ocean Park pier and won a ham. That made the evening complete, and we topped it off with a moonlight swim when we got home.

▼▼ THE FEATURE of *Night Angel* that we enjoyed most was the fine direction accorded it by Goulding. It is crowded with expert touches that distinguish his work when he is thinking about what he is doing. His first love scene with Nancy and Freddie is directed and acted beautifully. Nancy and Phoebe Foster have a scene that is full of story value, but in which not a word is spoken, another superb example of directing and acting. There are many other silent stretches, all of which are pure cinema, their values stressed by musical accompaniments. Goulding distinguishes himself again by the manner in which he wrote and directed a trial sequence. Nancy Carroll gives her evidence dramatically, but we do not see her, our attention being attracted to an officer who is showing some late-comers to their seats. The picture is full of such brilliant touches.

All the performances are excellent, particularly those of the two leads. March rapidly is becoming my favorite leading

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▼▼ IRVING THALBERG is quoted as saying that the film industry "welcomes even severe criticism when it is deserved." How does he know that? There has been lots of severe criticism, but up to date there has not been a single instance of the industry acknowledging that any of it was deserved. I'll say this for Irving, though—he didn't make the statement in Hollywood. He made it in London, where there is a possibility of it being believed. The film industry is intolerant of criticism of any sort. It whines every time anyone tells the truth about it. For five years the *Spectator* has been the best find the industry has had because it is the only publication printed anywhere that tells the industry the truth about itself and which offers it

constructive criticism unaffected by material considerations. And during the five years the *Spectator* is the only film publication with which the industry has spent no money in advertising. Welcomes criticism? Rot! The only criticism that the industry welcomes is the criticism it can buy. It cries like a baby when it is criticised, and it never, under any circumstances, would acknowledge that criticism is justified.

man, and I hereby serve notice on all reviewers that they can't keep me from viewing any picture in which he appears, no matter how much they roast it. While Nancy earned my

admiration by her manner of acting, she certainly did not intrigue me by her appearance. The cameraman must have been mad at her. I was glad to see Alan Hale on the screen again. He is a splendid actor whom producers are neglecting shamefully. Miss Foster, who impressed me with her work in a couple of other pictures, gives an intelligent performance in this one. Alison Skipworth's performance is weakened somewhat by the fact that it savors too much of the stage. Paramount gave the picture an elaborate and attractive production. I am sorry I reviewed *Night Angel* so late. If you missed it, I don't think you can find it now.

Chan Still Carries On

ONE THING to the credit of *The Black Camel* is the fact that it does more than any other picture has done to give us a comprehensive impression of the social life and the scenery of Honolulu. After viewing it I feel that I know my Hawaii rather well. William Sistrom, a Fox associate producer, took his company to the islands in search of authentic backgrounds for the story's action, the result being one of the most attractive productions pictorially that we have had since talkies have confined themselves almost exclusively to the interior of residences in which sophisticated people live and commit indiscretions that produce the complications out of which domestic dramas are built.

Instead of sophisticated indiscretions we have in *Black Camel* two murders with delightful backgrounds, nice, clean murders, the first of which brings to an end an interesting performance by Dorothy Revier, while the second removes from the picture an intriguing rogue who levies blackmail like a gentleman and makes us like him while he does it. I don't know who he is, but he is a good actor. The story deals with unravelling the mysteries of the two immediate murders and another that occurred three years before *Black Camel* begins. I found the unravelling interesting and I can't understand why

the picture is not giving a better account of itself at the box-office. It was directed most capably by Hamilton MacFadden and admirably photographed by Joe August and Dan Clark. The cast is an excellent one and all the performances are good.

▼▼ WARNER OLAND has his old role as *Charlie Chan*, and perhaps because the locale is his native heath, he is not quite so obsequious in his characterization as he was before. Oland is a superb actor. A mystery story is tricky screen material. To keep the mystery intact until the end is reached, the characters must do things that mean nothing to the audience until the denouement makes everything clear. In *Black Camel* the interest is maintained solely by the clever performance contributed by Oland. He forces us to keep our eyes on him and by his art holds the story together even though we don't know which way it's heading.

The feature of the picture that impresses me most is the evidence it gives that Fox was sincere in its effort to give it an authentic background that in itself has story value. The scenic embellishment of *Black Camel* alone is worth whatever we must pay to see it. On the debit side, however, we have what perhaps is the silliest "comedy relief" ever inflicted on a pic-

ture, as well as a romance between Sally Eilers and an agreeable young fellow that has nothing whatever to do with the story . . . And I almost forgot to credit Bela Lugosi with a very worthy performance.

Waste and Wisdom

TERRY RAMSAYE some weeks ago contributed a rather weird editorial to the excellent *Motion Picture Herald* of which he is editor. In his role of apologist for the film industry he takes up the question of the waste of money, using as a text the Wodehouse incident which received such wide publicity. Ramsaye indirectly defends studio waste by citing examples of expensive mistakes committed by other industries. Here is one of them: "Once a great motor car company had to call in its whole season's output because of a silly error in construction." The motor company saw its mistake and corrected it. That was the end of it. It is safe to assume that thereafter it turned out good cars without errors in construction. The film industry has been committing its mistakes over and over again for all the years it has existed.

Again Ramsaye says: "The fate of this industry does not rest on its wastes, its mistakes and its failures, even if in periods of stress nervous bankers and excitable executives do make them the subject of their chief concern and most vigorous vociferations in hot weather." There is evidence here that the heat must have affected Terry also. It would explain the wildness of his assertion that waste does not affect the fate of the industry. If there were nothing the matter with the manner in

which the industry conducts its business, there would be nothing the matter with its product, and no box-office depression now. If the industry conducted its business properly, there would be no waste. Remove the incompetency that is responsible for the waste, and we would have pictures that would bring prosperity back to the box-office. The two can not be divorced.

▼▼ STUDIO EXTRAVAGANCE does not interest me even remotely from the standpoint of waste. It is none of my business how much money the studios squander needlessly. I am interested solely in the quality of the pictures they offer to the public. Box-office figures prove that the public does not like the kind of pictures it is getting, and when we look for the reason we find that by the methods in vogue in the studios an even degree of entertainment value can not be maintained. These methods, we discover, are responsible for a terrific waste of money as well as a lack of quality. The waste is unimportant, but the lack of quality is important. In looking for a remedy we can approach the task from the standpoint of either the waste or the quality. Cure one and you cure both.

New York bankers, even in cool weather, can think only in terms of money. To them the waste is important. To the *Spectator* the quality is what matters. I criticise waste only because I am aware that if pictures were made properly we would have better pictures and no waste. The millions squandered on stories that are not produced, productions that practically are remade before they are released, others that never are released; gigantic salaries paid to people with no picture knowledge, vast sums spent on talent that is not used—these and a dozen other products of studio inefficiency would disappear if the studios became efficient in their manner of making pictures. The fate of the industry certainly does rest on its removing the cause of the waste.

Musical Pictures

MUCH TO MY surprise, for I hadn't encountered anyone who had a kind word for it, I derived thorough enjoyment from *Children of Dreams* which Warner Brothers made two years ago and only two months ago summed up nerve enough to release. The Romberg music is delightful and the production is an ambitious one that gives the film considerable pictorial value. Margaret Schilling, whose musical career is the theme of the story, acts her part acceptably and sings it in fine voice and with complete understanding of the values of her numbers. The ensemble singing with which the production is endowed so richly, had much to do with my enjoyment of the offering.

In releasing the picture at a time when the industry is turning its attention to musicals again, Warners have performed a service to the screen in general. The story of *Children of Dreams* is its weakest feature. If music on the screen is enough of itself to assure the success of a musical picture, this one would have been successful. But it is proving a failure. Therein lies a valuable lesson to Hollywood producers. It proves that the public will not accept music as a substitute for story. First there must be a story that the audience can follow with its eyes, and then its success can be assured to the extent that it is embellished intelligently with musical numbers.

▼▼ THERE CAN BE NO substitute on the screen for a motion picture, in which there is a story told in a progression of scenes that do not wander from it. Any medium that advances the story can be used, but it must be used consistently. The weakness of *Children of Dreams* is that it endeavors to express itself in two different mediums—straight motion picture technic in which music has no part, and in scenes that depend for their values on musical backgrounds. Only when the picture gets away from its musical treatment did it fail to interest me. There was so much music, however, that glided gracefully into the story that I saw nothing odd about a group of apple-pickers breaking into song with no obvious provocation. I went to see a musical picture and I expected the music.

Children of Dreams, more than any other musical offering that I have seen on the screen, satisfied me anew that musicals have a definite place in film entertainment. The stories must be simple and free from too many complications, and music must be used only as a story-telling medium, and must avoid the appearance of being included only as music. I think it will be difficult to make successful pictures whose stories deal with musical themes, for such pictures bring the music itself too much to the front with the result that the smooth telling of the story is interfered with. If the picture sets its atmosphere properly and maintains it consistently, the music will become an element that can serve logically to advance the story. The whole mission of a motion picture is to create an illusion of reality, and there is no reason why music can not be handled in a manner that will assist to accomplish this end. The first musicals failed because invariably music was introduced

in a way that retarded the flow of story interest. Anything, including music, that can contribute to the advancement of the story, has a place on the screen.

Specializing

LET US IMAGINE something: The business of a New York bank is not satisfactory. Deposits are falling off, the reserve is being reduced and the customers seem discontented. The directors meet and consider what is to be done. One of the wisest of them suggests a remedy. Why not send out to Hollywood for a motion picture producer? Have him come here, look over our books and tell us what we should do to bolster up our business.

That's asking our imaginations to perform a prodigious feat. No bank would dream of doing a thing like that. What do motion picture producers know about running a bank?

But every once in a while a New York banker comes out here to tell us how we should make pictures. If we are not qualified to run the banker's business, why does he regard himself as qualified to run ours?

Peculiarly enough, however, the last visiting banker who snooped around Hollywood had at least one good suggestion to make, although I don't suppose he had the slightest idea how one should go about its adoption. He said that to improve the quality of pictures producers should specialize as New York stage producers do. That is exactly what the screen needs, and it is what it is going to get when unit production, the inevitable next development, comes into its own.

Under the present crazy system a writer or director is told to handle a given story. A writer-director combination admirably adapted to the making of mother-love pictures, is liable to be handed a murder-mystery story. When we have unit production each combination will specialize in the kind of pictures it likes, and that will mean a tremendous uplift in the quality of the pictures that we will get.

Borzage Again

AS TENDER in spots as *Seventh Heaven*, rich in the human quality that makes the real Borzage picture something more than just a picture, *Bad Girl* is an achievement that will renew our faith in the art of the screen. It did not provide Frank Borzage with the terrific background that he had in *Seventh Heaven*, nor are his leading characters as picturesque, as intriguing in themselves, as were the glorious *Diane* and the joyous *Chico;* but out of the material provided him in *Bad Girl* he has fashioned a motion picture that is entitled to a place beside the masterpiece of optimism that brought to us Janet Gaynor and Charlie Farrell. This time we have Sally Eilers and James Dunn. Both of them are new. You know you haven't seen Jimmy Dunn and you think you have seen Sally Eilers. But you haven't—not Frank Borzage's Sally Eilers.

The importance of the direction to a screen creation is demonstrated in *Bad Girl*. No more prosaic material ever was made into a motion picture. A mannequin marries a boy who works in a radio shop. A baby is coming, and each thinks the other doesn't want it. In the final scene the discovery is made that each of them wanted it all the time. That's about all there is to the story. The characters are equally prosaic. The girl is just a girl—any girl. She has no outstanding attributes, does nothing unusual and makes no brilliant speeches. The boy is awkward and inarticulate; has something inside him that he can't express, and is a hopeless failure at saying pretty things that reveal his great love for the girl.

▼▼ BUT SO INTELLIGENTLY did Edwin Burke prepare the script and so brilliantly did Borzage handle his elements that a really great picture results from the unpromising material. Borzage must have loved his story. He puts into its screening the heart-throb that always distinguishes his best work. There was a lump in my throat nearly all the time I was viewing the picture, and when Jimmy Dunn—I am sure they call him Jimmy—implores the great doctor to take the confinement case, I broke down and cried. Throughout the production there is that ineffable sweetness that Borzage has taught us to expect from him, the masterly human note that he strikes so poignantly. But *Bad Girl* does not drip sentiment. Not at all. It is a vigorous picture that mixes laughter with its manly tears. It is filled with inspired directorial touches and is rich in production value.

Bad Girl is essentially a motion picture. There is dialogue all the way through, but nearly all the story is told by the camera, with the dialogue used chiefly to heighten the illusion of reality. In this respect the scenario is one of the cleverest that have been written for talkies. Dunn stammers repeatedly that he can't say what he wants to, yet all the time his expres-

sion and actions reveal to us clearly what is in his mind, thus enabling the camera to assume its proper place in the art of the screen. Some speeches, of course, are used to carry the story, but I don't think there are any more than there were titles in the average silent picture. Also in a technical sense *Bad Girl* approaches perfection. Before I captured the gentle person who goes to see motion pictures with me, she was a trained nurse, and she assures me that the hospital sequence in this picture is accurate down to the smallest detail. "Those pillows are exactly right," she whispered while we were looking at Sally Eilers in a hospital bed.

Borzage has an uncanny knack of getting superb performances from the members of his cast when he is given material for which he has a sympathetic feeling. I never even heard of Dunn before, but I presume he is from the stage. It takes only one picture to make a picture actor out of him when he has the advantage of the Borzage direction. He is a likable boy whose personality will gain him friends all over the world. When he goes to the great doctor in the scene I have mentioned, and for the first time becomes articulate and pours out all that is in his mind and heart, he gives a magnificent exhibition of emotional acting. If you can watch that scene and speak within five minutes after it is over, you are hard-boiled.

▼▼ THE FIRST TIME I saw Sally Eilers on the screen I raved over her and predicted great things for her. I did the same thing with Janet Gaynor. Janet came along in *Seventh Heaven* and did credit to my prophetic powers, and now along comes Sally in *Bad Girl* and further enhances my standing as a guesser. I am grateful to Frank Borzage for his wise piloting of both girls. Sally's performance is intelligent. The wife is a rather foolish girl and Sally gets inside the character and makes her lovable and understandable. Of almost as much importance to the story as the two principals is the kind-hearted and worldly-wise girl played by Minna Gombell. Her performance is a delight. Claude King plays the famous doctor. It is just a bit, but when you see Dunn's big scene in the doctor's office, take note of the large contribution made to it by the doctor, who merely sits, smiles, and says little. But only a really fine actor could do these little things so well.

There is another little bit done beautifully by a character actress whose name I don't know. As an incident in establishing the character of the tenement house in which Sally Eilers lives, the woman comes down the stairs, passes Sally and Dunn and goes to a phone on the wall. Apparently it is her sister to whom she talks and whom she acquaints with the fact that their mother has died. The capable actress to whom the bit was assigned makes it stand out as one of the many great moments in the picture.

Exhibitors everywhere should insist upon getting *Bad Girl*. It is a triumph for the Fox production forces.

A Magnificent Flop

NO OTHER picture turned out by Paramount in quite a long time has met with such a chorus of adverse criticism as was accorded *The Magnificent Lie*, which Berthold Viertel directed and in which Ruth Chatterton starred. I read a lot of reviews of it and not one of them treated it kindly. But here and there something in it was mentioned favorably by a critic, and when I had taken the reviews as a whole I made the interesting discovery that while the picture generally was condemned, each of the parts that composed it had met with someone's approval. This made me want to see it, which I did when it came to my most convenient neighborhood house.

Magnificent Lie is a terrible picture because it was made from a cruel and inhuman story, a disgusting and heartless narrative of the baiting of a fine young man who was blinded by his war injuries and whose clean love for his memory of a woman whom he thought worthy of it, was made the subject of the coarse jokes of the most despicable set of characters ever assembled in one screen offering. It is the kind of picture that makes one mad, that irritates to the point of nausea, and which outrages one's sense of decency. How anyone on the Para-

mount lot could have imagined that such a theme would be received favorably is past comprehension.

▼▼ RALPH BELLAMY, an upstanding actor with an ingratiating personality that will earn him the instant comradeship of any audience, loses his eyesight when the French actress whose memory he has worshipped for thirteen years, comes to his town to play *Camille*. Stuart Erwin, always a dependable and excellent actor, is the only one in the cast who feels sorry for him. The others use the poor fellow's tragedy as an excuse for a series of outrageous actions which they seem to think are funny. They reveal themselves as vile creatures, and the picture makes an attempt to present their vileness as entertainment. In what I suppose was considered by Paramount as one of the great moments of the production, Ruth Chatterton makes the pathetic war hero helplessly drunk. A noble spectacle indeed!

What difference does it make if the performances in such a picture are good and if it has had most capable direction? Bellamy proves himself an admirable actor and Erwin strikes a sympathetic note, but I wouldn't like the rest even if they were good. Ruth Chatterton's role is the worst ever handed to her, and it was beyond her powers to make it acceptable. The script was written by Samuel Raphaelson and Vincent Lawrence, and if we may judge by what it reveals, they will be out of a job when Paramount begins to make motion pictures again. *Magnificent Lie* does not resemble a motion picture even remotely. It talks its way every inch across the screen. That is another thing that made me mad.

I hope Paramount loses so much money on this pitiable exhibition that it never will commit a like offense.

Dull Huckleberry

PARAMOUNT lifted too many incidents and not enough humor from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and made an exceedingly dull picture. In the book there are a score or more motion pictures, and an effort was made to squeeze all of them into one. All the children who made *Tom Sawyer* such a successful picture are assembled in *Huckleberry Finn*, and the result would indicate that Paramount was under the impression that it could make a motion picture out of children and not by the intelligent direction of a good script. Norman Taurog, who made such a beautiful job of *Skippy*, never had a chance with *Huckleberry*, as he obviously was handed a scenario out of which it was impossible to make a good picture.

Children can't *talk* a motion picture. They have to *act* it if it is to be entertaining. We are not interested in what children say, but we can become interested in what they are doing. Taurog seems to have grasped this when he made *Skippy*, and John Cromwell certainly had it in mind when he gave us the beautifully directed *Tom Sawyer;* but the writers of the *Huckleberry Finn* script thought that all the public wants is to hear dialogue. How anyone could have read the script and figured that the picture had even a slight chance of success is one of those puzzles that make the film industry so baffling. The camera is disregarded entirely as the story-telling medium; there is no evidence of a sense of humor having had contact

with the production; the adaptation is a poor piece of work and the direction is wooden.

▼▼ If Paramount had taken one incident from the book, preferably the boys' trip on the raft, and developed it into a picture with some of the Twain quality of humor in it, and including those carefully drawn characterizations that all children's pictures must have if they are to succeed, it might have given us another *Tom Sawyer* or *Skippy;* but instead of doing this, it helped itself so freely from the book that the picture had to talk rapidly to get it all in. There are no characterizations that amount to anything, and no dialogue worth listening to.

It is too bad that the witch doctor whom Paramount employs was not on the job early enough to cast his spell over this production. It might have helped some if he had told his bosses that they can't make money by selling stories that the public has to listen to. I have been telling the bosses that for some years, but as I don't charge them anything for it, they refuse to consider it worth listening to. And they continue to buy red ink.

Silence Not Golden

When a producer makes a talkie from a story from which an outstanding silent picture was made only a few years previous, he invites comparisons. I don't suppose I ever will forget H. B. Warner's superb performance in the silent *Silence*, his understanding of the part, his restraint and impressiveness, and the poignancy he put into his suffering while apparently striving to keep it hidden. There is no use telling me that I should not have recalled Harry Warner while watching Clive Brook in the talkie, *Silence*. I did, and that is all there is to it. Any comparison between the two pictures as works of screen art is vastly to the credit of the silent picture. In it Warner had to resort to screen art to register his points, and he did it magnificently. In the talkie Brook merely had to put into words what he wishes to convey, and he was given little opportunity to employ the means of expression that made the screen a great art.

As my estimate of the talkie *Silence* was influenced by my memories of the notable silent version, I am afraid I am a poor judge of the virtues of the former. I did not enjoy it. For one thing, I think the story used in the new edition is vastly inferior to that used before. I remembered I felt keen sympathy for Warner, and I watched Brook without a trace of emotion. Both versions have the same fault—the illogical "happy" ending. In reality there is no story unless *Jim Warren* dies on the scaffold, but in each of the pictures the story is sacrificed to the studio obsession that the public doesn't

want logic. In this picture I saw Peggy Shannon for the first time. Paramount is striving industriously to make a star of her. It has a tough job ahead. The young woman is attractive and intelligent, but she lacks the added something that makes one of star calibre. I hope I am wrong.

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▼▼ IF I WERE making a collection of the year's funniest things it would include the announcement of Lou Sarecky that hereafter the pictures to be supervised by him will consist of two-thirds action and one-third dialogue. This system of making pictures with a yard stick would be all right for an organization that had so much money that it didn't give a hang whether it made any more, but as Radio has been borrowing to keep going, I would advise it to impress upon Lou that his plan won't work. The exact amount of dialogue that a given picture should have is the exact amount it should have. It might be one-third, one-eighth or nine-seventeenths. Now, if Lou had said that hereafter he was going to select only such stories as would need not more than one-third of their footage to be devoted to dialogue, he would have been saying a mouthful. But that is not what he did say, assuming he was quoted correctly. When his characters have talked their way through one-third of his picture, they are going to be mum for the rest of the footage. And that is funny.

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▼▼ PRODUCERS WHO are wondering just how music should be handled in their productions might learn something from one of Hal Roach's Zasu Pitts-Thelma Todd short subjects that I viewed recently in a beach house. I forget its name. It opens with a selection by a group of men whose singing acts as a background for the main titles and whom we see as the picture opens when the song becomes part of the story. At various intervals throughout the film more music is introduced as sensibly, never acting as a brake on the action. I don't run across many Roach comedies, but if all of them are presented with as great production value, as much restraint in the comedy situations and so rich in humor, I hope I see more of them. Hal Roach himself directed this one and made an excellent job of it. I can't agree with him, however, that Zasu and Thelma should be addressed on the screen by their real names. It reminds us that we are looking at actresses, something that we should forget when we look at a motion picture.

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▼▼ WITH THE SINGLE exception of the inclusion of the *Spectator* in its list of screen papers, I can imagine nothing about the film business that is not embraced in the *Motion Picture Almanac*, an extraordinary volume recently brought out by the Quigley publications. It must have been a stupendous task to assemble all the information that is arranged so handily between the covers. It is a book that should prove of the utmost value to the entire industry, one that should be on the desk of every executive, on the shelves of every studio and public library, and in the hands of the film editors of all the publications that ever even mention motion pictures. It is a volume that one can not review beyond stating that it contains every known fact about pictures, their organizations, their finances, their personnel and all their supplementary businesses. Truly a commendable work, courageously conceived and admirably executed. It is so up to date that it doesn't list Horace Liveright among Pathé's assets.

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▼▼ THE FILMARTE theatre in Hollywood continues to be of real service to pictures generally by giving us an opportunity to keep abreast of foreign production. Some of its offerings do not conform to our ideas of screen entertainment, but all of them can teach us something. Hollywood would do well to watch for anything that René Clair turns out. He is one producer-director who has a real message. Hollywood has produced few pictures that matched the brilliance of *Sous les Toits de Paris*. And more recently he has done *Le Million*, a scintillating comedy which reveals that its director has a rare sense of humor and an extraordinary appreciation of screen values. Again we have some of the baffling camera work that distinguished the previous picture. *Le Million* really is a Mack Sennett two-reeler improved and stretched to feature length without any sacrifice of its joyous quality. It shows us that Clair knows what screen art is.

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▼▼ PRODUCERS CAN do no wrong. Ask them what is the matter with the box-office and they will tell you that it is being affected by the general business depression, that conditions, not pictures, are responsible for the unsatisfactory financial position of the industry. Many times I have maintained in the *Spectator* that the business depression has had very little to do with the poor box-office returns. The depression in Germany is much worse than the one that afflicts the United States. No one will dispute that. If the picture business and general business are related so closely that when one suffers the other must, box-office conditions in Germany would be more grave than those which exist in this country. Some weeks ago the *Motion Picture Herald* printed a cable from Berlin which ended with this sentence: "Normal production and distribution facilities have existed during the entire hectic period, and up to now attendance has been satisfactory."

▼ ▼

▼▼ "RICHARD SCHAYER wrote the original story, which Walter de Leon is adapting." This winds up an item in Jimmy Starr's column about a Universal picture. It makes one wonder when the screen is going to grow up. Schayer is head of Universal's story department. He passes upon stories out of which he thinks good pictures could be made, but when he writes one himself, someone else must "adapt" it to screen requirements. This is no criticism of Schayer. It is aimed at the silly system that prevails in the industry. Why couldn't the story be written for the screen in the first place? Surely the head of a screen story department should be allowed to write a screen story that no one would have to paw over before it could be put on the screen. When Hollywood really grows up the only stories it will consider will be those that are written exactly as they are going to be shot.

▼ ▼

▼▼ EVERY SATURDAY morning I do some of my *Spectator* writing. Always at ten forty-five I pause in my work and listen for fifteen minutes to the voice of Don Ricardo which comes to me over KHJ. He has the perfect microphone voice and could be made an outstanding success in musical pictures

if producers ever acquire an understanding of how such pictures should be made. Ricardo has something in addition to an admirably trained voice of fine quality. He has the kind of personality that the public warms to promptly and he could acquire a following by his acting only. His real name is David Percy and he has done some picture work. He broadcasts nationally, which gives his radio name considerable exploitation value.

▼ ▼

▼▼ PARAMOUNT announces that it is going to take a leaf out of Metro's book and perform major operations on its pictures that reveal weak spots when they are previewed before audiences. A quicker and cheaper plan for Paramount to adopt would be to make pictures that did not require retakes. Public announcement of the fact that hereafter the retake policy will prevail on the lot amounts to an invitation to writers and directors to be as careless as they like in their first attempts to make their pictures. If scripts were prepared properly there would be no reason for retakes.

▼ ▼

▼▼ IT WOULD BE interesting to know where Paramount got the name, *Night Angel*, that is tacked onto the Eddie Goulding picture made at the Long Island studio. There is no more night in it than there is in most pictures, and throughout its entire length there is not the slightest suggestion of anything angelic. As it ends on top of something with Nancy Carroll clutching Fredric March against the sky, it might as well have borrowed an idea from René Clair's *Sous les Toits de Paris* and called itself *Au dessus des Toits de Prague*.

▼ ▼

▼▼ CULLED FROM my fan mail: "May I verbally shake your hand for your comment and predictions on Norma Shearer's pictures? Miss Shearer is such a clean sort of a person, she even looks clean to me, as though she were just freshly scrubbed. Why then, should she play such questionable parts? *Free Soul* was good, even though Lionel Barrymore almost stole the show. Still it was a 'dirty picture,' so keep right on hammering for better pictures for Norma. You will be doing her a favor."

▼ ▼

▼▼ THE OTHER NIGHT I encountered a Pathé two-reel comedy that contained an excellent performance by Bobby Agnew, who was a great favorite a few years ago. His impersonation of a flirtatious girl is presented with rare skill and evidence of a lively sense of humor. I did not know that he could do such good work. Producers should not continue to overlook him.

▼ ▼

▼▼ AS A MITIGATING circumstance we should consider the fact that although it has been operating for several generations, the Vanderbilt family has given us but one Neil.

▼ ▼ ▼

Interesting If True

(G. A. Atkinson in The Methodist Times, London)

It interests me, as an informed commentator on this terrific panorama, to notice that the only Church which has made any kind of effective stand against diabolical films is the Roman Catholic Church and, for that reason, the only Church of which the cinema industry is afraid is the Roman Church. That is probably because the Roman Church has a touch of drama in its constitutional procedure and has the art of throwing the full weight of tradition into its movements. It is a fact that Italy and the Irish Free State, for example, have practically succeeded in smashing the onset of the evil films, even though, in the process, they have all but brought the theatres to a standstill.

Italy is taking no risks with the elements in foreign entertainment that might undermine her patriotic ambitions, and Ireland has her traditional reputation to maintain as the country in which the standard of chastity is higher than in any other. Ireland bans the talkies in wholesale fashion, a policy epigrammatically expressed by the chief of its censoring board, who said that "what might be good enough for 120,000,000 people in America is not good enough for 3,000,000 people in Ireland." And that, I may say, expresses my policy as a film critic—only the best is good enough for the English people.

▼ ▼ ▼

The Insult of Vulgarity

(Jeanette Stratton Porter in Motion Picture Herald)

Now the old question of pictures for children is practically eliminated: we are forced to provide other diversion and amusement for them. I am now concerned with the much more important question of what pictures we may see which will not outrage our sense of decency and code of morals and insult our imagination, mentality and sense of humor.

Farewell to Hollywood

By R. E. Sherwood

THESE last words are written with a trembling pencil. I am at the moment on the Chief, rattling and lurching across the irregular topography of Arizona. (By the way, just what *is* an arroyo?) The sky is deeply, gloriously blue, but far off to the eastward, ahead of us, is an electrical storm. Increasingly far off to the westward, behind us, is Hollywood.

Like so many other members of the Dramatists' Guild of the Authors' League of America, I am making the return trip to New York. My option was not renewed—largely because I never had an option.

What impressions of the Cinema Citadel am I taking home with me? Who wants to know?

▼▼ TO BEGIN WITH, I am going back to New York in a state of comparative humiliation, for when I confront the boys and girls in the back room at Tony's I shall have no comical stories to tell them—at any rate, no stories of which I am the oppressed hero.

All I can say to them is that I found Hollywood a pleasant, if unexciting, community, populated by extraordinarily friendly, kindly, unpretentious people—and to say that sort of thing in New York is to expose oneself as a hopeless dull-wit.

Perhaps by the time I reach 125th Street I shall have thought up a number of fascinating yarns of how I was neglected, misunderstood, browbeaten and gypped by the movie moguls; but as things stand, my report is going to be highly disappointing to the numerous admirers of my acidulous style.

▼▼ IN THREE MONTHS of attendance at a film studio, laboring on three different pictures, I encountered no more instances of stupidity than I would have bumped into had I been employed in a magazine editor's, book publisher's or theatrical manager's office, or even in a bank; indeed—if the truth must be blurted out—fewer instances.

It has seemed to me that, in the main, the inferior quality of Hollywood's product may be attributed to indolence rather than to ignorance. It is not lack of brains that is responsible for mediocrity; it is lack of ambition. And there is ample reason for this lack: The film workers have become obsessed with a fatal sense of impermanence. "Easy come, easy go", and "What will it matter a hundred years from to-day?" are expressions indicative of their philosophy of defeatism.

There is no self-respecting architect who does not cherish the conviction that someday he will create an edifice that will stand forever, like the Parthenon or the Cathedral of Chartres, as a monument to his eternal glory.

There is no real artist who does not hope that, eventually, he will paint a picture which will be enshrined in the Louvre.

There is no writer who does not imagine that, perhaps by accident, he will produce a play or novel or poem which will gain a permanent place in world literature.

There is no engineer who rejects utterly the possibility that he may evolve a formula comparable in enduring importance to Newton's.

▼▼ THE TOILERS in the Hollywood vineyards, however, know that there isn't the slightest chance that their works will last more than a season. The better and more intelligent they are, the stronger seems to be this conviction. Their dearest wish is to achieve a few record grosses, make a lot of money, save it, and then retire to the south of France while they're still young enough to respond to the Riviera's manifold allurements.

They look at the great silent picture triumphs of ten or even five years ago, observe that these films are now laughably out of date, realize that new mechanical inventions will soon make the current crop of masterpieces similarly obsolete, and come to the conclusion that any undue expenditure of mental energy is a waste of time. "Get the dough, and then get out!" Such is the Hollywood battle cry, and it is one which does not lead to the achievement of those finer and better things of which Merton Gill once dreamed.

Memories

▼▼ AS THIS TRAIN on which I'm riding and writing slides down toward Gallup, N.M., random recollections of Hollywood and environs arise to remind me that I had a good time.

They are, in case you're interested, about as follows:

Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., giving a startling correct imitation of Noel Coward.

A ride to the preview of *The Age for Love* with Howard Hughes at the wheel. All I could think of during the wild progress was: "Well, anyway, this is one sure way to get my death chronicled on the front page."

The nicest house and garden that I saw in Southern California was that of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Rosson.

Eddie Cantor's description of a Jewish radio announcer at a prize-fight, broadcasting the mournful news that "Goldberg is DOWN!"

(We are now in Gallup, N. M., and there are actually cow ponies tethered to telegraph poles. I wonder if they're props.)

The flight of steps leading to Samuel Goldwyn's office. At the foot of the flight is a gate, with the sign, "PRIVATE—EXIT ONLY".

Vincent Barnett, the supreme ribber, with whom I spent a horribly harrowing three hours without once suspecting that I was being had.

The Achillean heel in the make-up of the brilliant, corpulent Lewis Milestone is the notion that he can play tennis.

My daughter's Scotch terrier puppy being chased by the neighbor's white rabbit.

Irving Thalberg berating Douglas Fairbanks for all this talk about retirements and then, later in the conversation, announcing, "I'm going to stay on the job for five more years and then, after that, *they can have it!*"

The moment in Agua Caliente when all seemed lost and then—lo and behold number 13 came up.

The expression of amazement on the countenance of Groucho Marx when, in the Brown Derby, a little girl came up and asked for his autograph.

Joan Bennett taking tennis lessons on the courts at the Beverly Hills Hotel—and I hope she'll be at it soon again, as she's a treat to the eye.

The sketches of scenes for Howard Hawks' production, *Scarface*.

The recitation of these recollections might easily go on all the way across the continent, but I must mail this copy to-night in Albuquerque, so I shall forget for the moment to remember.

Street Scene

▼▼ A LOT WILL be said and written about King Vidor's superb direction of *Street Scene*, and about the forceful performances by Sylvia Sidney, Estelle Taylor, Beulah Bondi, William Collier, Jr., and David Landau, among many others —and the general expressions of praise will be deserved. But I doubt that sufficient credit will be given to Al Newman, who arranged the musical score which enhances immeasurably the strength of this fine picture.

Mr. Newman has supplied some genuinely interpretive music. By means of a few blue chords, inserted here and there, he has added a note of operatic grandeur to the drama of Elmer Rice's play.

It is a wonderful achievement to get the audience into the soul of a story even before the main title has faded from the screen.

▼▼ I THINK THAT King Vidor's direction of the dialogue in *Street Scene* should be studied and imitated by all other directors. For here is a demonstration of perfect timing and perfect emphasis. All the cuts, from one character to another, and all the camera angles, are dictated by consciousness of the importance of what is being said or thought by the characters at the moment, rather than by the desire to create arty pictorial effects.

▼▼ THE NEXT CHATTY little article that I contribute to this journal will be mailed from New York which, henceforth as previously, will be my residence.

If in the future any of my host of friends on the West Coast wish to communicate with me they can best do so through the medium of an advertisement in the *Hollywood Spectator*.

Nearing Albuquerque

▼▼ FOR THE TIME being, as my final farewell to Hollywood and to all those within it whom I like and admire and respect (and that goes for you too, Mr. Beaton), I can only say this, as my unalterable opinion:

Good or bad—and new inventions or no new inventions—it *will* matter a hundred years from to-day.

▼ ▼ ▼

About Pioneers and Indians and Summer

By Arabella MacInnes

THIS time of year always seems to imbue me with an appreciation of the pioneer spirit. There may be a reason for it,—I don't know. Perhaps it is because it is just past graduation time in the schools, or because so many people decide to get married in the summer; or simply because I am so thankful I am living now instead of in that period when my ancestors were so busy settling things with the Indians.

My tender regard for the Indian does not include the whoop-ee he used to make, and I still contend that a scalp on the head is worth nine at the belt. I have known some very fine Indians and do not mean to disparage their character; indeed I count some of them as very loyal friends. One of the great thrills of my life was that my companionship was eagerly sought by one or two generations of them who arrived one day in a sailboat near the spot where a party of us was camping and fishing. They wanted to take me with them. I looked at them for some moments and wondered whether I could honestly say in my heart, "Whither thou goest, I will go," but the old squaw who attracted my attention at the time did not in the least resemble Naomi and my name was not Ruth, so I remained where I was. I attribute the friendliness on their part to the heavy coat of tan I had acquired, the fact that I never talked very much, and that their dogs liked me. The unromantic part of this occurrence was that the Indians departed as soon as we had complied with their request for a box of matches, apparently preferring these to my flaming personality.

▼▼ WHO WAS it who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage? Well, I kept mine for a box of matches, and shortly afterwards I caught the gamest black bass we had seen that season.

Indians or no Indians, in a sense we are all pioneers, provided we are actively engaged in something; but you can't just sit down quietly and be a pioneer,—unless you happen to be a writer. To mention pioneers and motion pictures in the same breath is scarcely conceivable, and no one would ever think of such a thing were he to judge solely from the pretty, little pioneer cabins tucked away in Beverly Hills, but the film industry is still in the pioneer stage.

There have been numerous raids on the peace of mind of the film colony recently which have caused considerable bloodshed. Salaries have cried for mercy, writers have tortured themselves with the idea that they should have more recognition, producers have tried to trade everything they know for motion pictures, critics have been on the war-path, and directors have been riding the talent they have at their command as fast and as hard as they can.

When some of the gun-smoke from gangster films clears away and the arrows of contempt for poor productions are hacked out of the walls of the various studios, someone will stroll leisurely down Hollywood Boulevard with a pipe of peace, Wall Street will hold another pow-wow,—and then, Oh, what a glorious opportunity for some cheerful medicine-man to appear with some good stories which he will tell in time-honored sign-language, with little audible dialogue, and an honest regard for the essentials of screen-art!

Another Innocent Sees Things Abroad

By Frank Tuttle

Perhaps I am taking advantage of Frank Tuttle, but if he did not wish me to publish the following personal letter, he should not have made it so interesting. He writes from Budapest.—W. B.

Dear Welford:

Since that dim, distant moment when I promised to mail you a sheaf of European impressions much water has flowed under the bridges, and many other things have flowed under my bridge-work. We're in Budapest. Beneath the windows of our room in the Dunapalota the Beautiful Blue Danube (perversely tawny as a puma) idles along in majestic waltz time—for in the street café below whoever is directing this picture has tactfully supplied a sound tract by Strauss. Occasionally the mood is broken by an interlude of jazz, but we must forgive this apparent profanation. The musicians are merely thinking of Paul Lukas and the Vajda boys. They are playing, "Loafer, come back to me!"

In another two hours we shall have finished a leisurely and celestial dinner; a car will take us to the lovely Island of St. Marguerite and the Parisian Grill, where the waiters wear full evening dress, the gigolos dinner jackets and the cash customers what have you. Here the acts of the cabaret will be introduced by *Leni*, a seductive Hungarian blonde (she may be German) dressed a la Dietrich in the *Blue Angel* (dress suit sequence), and the trap-drummer will react with a wide and wicked eye to the name of Bob Armstrong. (They were here last winter.)

▼▼ From this you can readily see that when the local Lukas fans whisper naively of Hollywood, I laugh quietly in my beard (and if you think that's a rib, you should see the thing—a bit subtle perhaps, but certainly a fine promise of becoming a noble replica of its inspiration—the English hedge).

That brings us quite deftly to the beginning of the trip. England was everything you said it would be. It deserves volumes, but Germany and Russia are screaming for space, so one British anecdote will have to do. We (The Oliver Garretts were my better half in London) stayed at Miss Fay Compton's charming house in Hampstead. Her driver, a sturdy Britisher named John Shackleton, was helping us to explore. (What's in a name, indeed!)

"This," said he, "is Berkeley Square." And he distinctly pronounced the first syllable to rhyme with *jerk*.

"But," Oliver and I exploded in perfect synk, "we thought you called it '*Bark*-ly'."

"We do," replied the intrepid Shackleton, "but I was afraid you wouldn't understand."

Now I think it should be clear to every American why the sun never sets on British possessions.

▼▼ In Germany I spent a day at Ufa with Mr. Erich Pommer, who is as cordial and gracious as ever, and the busiest producer you ever did see. They have the unit system at Ufa—that is the supervisor, director and writer work together with practically no front office interference. Nearly every picture is made in three languages, and the three versions are photographed, so to speak, simultaneously. In other words they shoot a scene in German, then the French actors step in and they shoot it in French; then finally they take it in English with another change of cast. The picture I watched them making boasted a leading lady (an English girl named Harvey) who worked in all three languages. The usual shooting schedule for one of these three-in-ones is amazingly short—thirty-three days, I believe. On the other hand, the hours are longer than ours (or rather mine, to be just a bit snooty), nine to seven-thirty or eight. Herr Pommer tells me that musicals with a Viennese waltz flavor are the current European box-office bet.

In the U.S.S.R. I visited both the silent picture studio of Sovkino and the talking picture studio, too. At the former, an exceedingly intelligent and attractive Soviet director, Waldemar Stepanoff, took me around, an Intourist girl guide acting as interpreter. (I am tremendously tempted to tell you some non-cinematic anecdotes of Soviet Russia, but if I ever got started . . . . besides Mr. Maurice Hindus and the other excellent American reporters are telling the story with such thoughtful skill that it would be presumptuous of me to utter vague generalities based on impressions gleaned in a five-day visit. I'm not quite able to resist giving you just one, however. As it is quite personal and altogether trivial, I'm sure you won't read into it some esoteric political parable.)

▼▼ It seems that the usual American tourist to U.S.S.R. is pretty much of a trial to the Russian ladies of the Intourist who guide him. Instead of facing the fact that he's Alice-Through-the-Looking-Glass and that the Jabberwocky might be worth deciphering, he kicks at his accomodations and the food, and behaves in general like the Big Boss's show-off son at a factory clam-bake. Now it so happened that my mother brung (yes, it's *brung*) me up to give my seat to ladies in street cars, and besides my beard was at this time in the early pin-cushion or late Trotzky period. I puzzled them. According to what they had seen, I neither acted, talked nor looked like an American. On the other hand I spoke English and my trousers (when I arrived) were pressed. My guide finally broke down and confessed that her Intourist comrades had asked her what kind of a bird I was. When she told them I was American they were incredulous. "Why," they said, "he looks like a Big Bolshevik!"

▼▼ At the Sovkino silent studio they are building several large new stages which will be sound-proofed. When Mr. Stepanoff showed them to me they were about half-finished, and showed every promise of being entirely up-to-date. The studio now being used for talkies is fairly small and has a temporary sound-proofing, more or less like that used in Hollywood in the early days. The Russians use a French

camera (very light and mobile—a De Vrie, I think) and a sound device of their own invention (sound on film—more or less movietone). I am not familiar enough with technical details to describe it, but it seemed quite simple and compact, and I saw and heard its results, the first Russian talking picture, *The Criminal, Homeless Children (Bez Preezornie).* Don't miss it if it comes to the Filmarte. I won't spoil your enjoyment by giving you any story details, but the method of attacking the talking problem is unique (René Clair's method, only more so—and more or less the sort of thing you have been screaming about yourself).

Talk is only used to punch up a situation. The rest of the picture is synchronized—music being used whenever they feel it will help the effect (just as it was in silent days—another point to you, sir!) without any bogus logic—that is, you don't have to show a radio or an orchestra. If there's an exciting fight and a chase the music just starts and gives it the added tempo—and—excitement—background it needs. Do you remember the Civil War prologue to a picture I did—*Only the Brave?* Well, it's like that—action, music, a few staccato lines of dialogue, camera angles, movement—in other words *a moving picture,* and one that, incidentally, moves you.

▼▼ The Russians also make more than one language-version of their important pictures—but I think they are on the point of evolving (let's give credit again to René Clair for the same effort) a universal language such as the old silents had. All *The Homeless Children* needs is a few subtitles in front of each episode to give you a hint—most of it is perfectly obvious despite the Russian words. The picture has one minor stupidity—it carries several Russian subtitles, which describe what you will *see* a moment later (this, as I say, would be great for the foreign market, but seems bad art in their own country—perhaps it's to hammer over a propaganda point).

One amusing thought occurred to me in Leningrad. During May, June and part of July they have the famous *White Nights*—that is the sun never sets at all (while I was there there were only two hours of darkness). Boy, can you imagine what the shooting hours would be if some of the High Power Hollywood Hidalgos were in charge of production?

And there you are! And here I am—Vienna, Paris, Antibes, Paris, New York . . . home the end of August. The experience has been a terrific stimulus, and my skin is a little tougher (we flew from Berlin to Moscow—midnight to four the next afternoon—our first trip ever in a plane, and that would toughen anyone).

Always cordially,

Frank Tuttle

Crowding the Band Wagon

By DALTON TRUMBO

One of my duties around the office is regularly to look over the imposing array of motion picture trade magazines. Aside from keeping me in touch with the industry, this chore is of benefit to the *Spectator* because occasionally I run across pertinent bits of information which we reprint, giving credit to the magazine in which they originally appeared. You will find these sandwiched in wherever there is a small space into which the regular line of copy will not fit. When Rob Wagner is confronted with an inch or so of white in his *Script* he jots down something of his own about what he will do when he is king. None of us at the *Spectator* office ever expects to be king, so naturally our filler problem is more complicated than Mr. Wagner's. Quite obviously we are happy to reprint something which agrees with our views. There was a time, I am told, when one could read every inch of every trade magazine, and find nothing in agreement with *Spectator* contentions. Occasionally someone like Jack Alicoate took a friendly jibe at Mr. Beaton's insistence upon silent technic, but more often the latter gentleman was referred to editorially as a menace and a pariah.

I am pleased to report that those days have gone forever. I have in my desk enough clippings to last this journal until May of 1935. They are all in agreement with the ideas which Mr. Beaton has so enthusiastically set forth for the last two and one-half years. Not one of them credits the *Spectator's* editor with their original discovery. On the contrary, most of the solemn fellows who currently announced that talkies are a complete failure, rush into print with the information as though it were news. They click their heels together and break out with huzzahs for the good old days of silence. They nuzzle each other like friendly horses and decide that motion pictures should be presented with motion. They are all in complete agreement, but they write as though they were adventurers, sailing out into strange seas and finding new continents. Naturally they are as right as day. The only trouble is that they are two years late.

▼▼ Right here it may be well for me to mention that I am not paid for sycophantry. Nobody knows about what I am going to write until I sit down to my typewriter. I have yet to see a line of my stuff deleted or changed. I come in to the office each morning around ten o'clock, read the publicity with which the studios so kindly furnish me, chat with two charming young ladies who run the business, and leave about noon. Sometimes Mr. Beaton thoughtfully informs me that my copy is rotten, and other times he assures me it is quite good. Occasionally I run down to his beach home where we gravely discuss dogs, the surf, and recently the time it will take to read Sigrid Undset's twelve hundred page *Kristin Lavransdatter*. Once in a while we talk about motion pictures also, but never about what we are going to write of motion pictures. When these lines are written they will be as new to Mr. Beaton as they are to you, but probably less interesting.

The whole truth of the matter is that the motion picture trade journals are manned largely by what Mr. George Jean Nathan once called "journalistic free lunch scouts." I have the statement of at least one producer to the effect that the average trade paper is little better than a blackmail proposition. A perusal of their columns generally will convince the most unbiased that they are eager and willing to go a-whooping for anyone who will advertise, and to the largest advertiser goes the most resounding whoop. Hence when talkies came in and shot box-office receipts to celestial heights, the whoopers were ready with a full chorus. They had with them the producers, a whole flock of eastern gag men, theatri-

cal washouts, tin-pan-alley artists, literary adventurers and voice teachers. Against this imposing rank of talent were aligned a few miserable souls who knew motion pictures, but they quickly were superseded by the newcomers. During that period the most Godawful monstrosities ever seen on the screen were produced, to the accompaniment of a hack writer's Hallelujah chorus that has never been rivaled. The tambourines were outstretched and a curious public paid tens of millions for the privilege of hearing talk from a silent screen. The public can not be blamed. Even to-day I would pay five dollars to hear Rodin's *Thinker* tell of what he is thinking. But I would pay it only once.

▼▼ IT WAS THEN that the *Spectator* began to publish what will one day be considered the most thorough exposition of motion picture art that has yet seen the light of day. Mr. Beaton cleared his decks, stripped to the waist and attacked not only the producers but the actors and writers and finally the public in general. Each issue he was given the lie. Gold rushed in as regularly as the tide. The public went crazy over talkies. Hollywood thrived like an Oklahoma oil town, and it was only at nightfall when the racket had subsided somewhat that the dismal croaking of the *Spectator* could be discerned. At first the attack on talkies was regarded as an excellent joke. A little later it became an irritant. Finally it grew into a menace. At every talkie feast in Hollywood Mr. Beaton's death head was flourished. The box-office began to languish. It grew sicker and sicker. Now the poor thing is almost dead. Blood transfusions have failed. Adrenalin is being administered. Artificial respiration is at hand. From the outposts comes the anguished squawk of exhibitors. Or at least it originally was a squawk. Now it is something more potent. It resembles a roar, and its battle cry sounds painfully like an admonition to stave off buying until better pictures are made.

Here was a regrettable situation. Talking pictures had been perfected. The technic and presentation had been improved a thousand per cent. Million dollar writers had been hired to write stories for ten million dollar actors who were under contract to hundred million dollar studios. Everything on earth had been done, yet the industry was dying on its feet. It was obvious that eventually trade papers must get down to the truth, and finally they hit upon a solution. A motion picture should be a motion picture, not a photographed play! There was the thing. With one accord the industry's *literateurs* pounced upon the idea, and you only have to read the first trade paper that comes your way to see the result. Passionate appeals within heavy borders announce the remedy. There must be less talking and more action. There must be a revival of the pure cinema, a general search for all the old time writers and directors who have not yet starved to death. The fatted calf must be killed and served up to the rejected ones before the calf expires. And there you have the story which has become the clarion call of the cinema as reflected by its profound and alert trade publications.

▼▼ THE SPECTATOR'S editor has had the industry on the spot for two years, and only in the last six months has the industry come to a realization of its position. The position he took against talking pictures to-day is reflected not only among the trade papers, but it is dealt with editorially in magazines and newspapers throughout the world. Anyone to-day who deals with the fundamentals of motion pictures is in an embarrassing position. There is not one principle of silent technic which he can discuss that has not already been expounded by Mr. Beaton. Yet the occasional writer obviously can not credit that gentleman, or his stuff will appear to the public as a direct steal. The only salvation lies in expressing these fundamentals in original and different ways. That is what is being done to-day. As I have said, my desk is full

(Continued on Page 25)

TRUMBO REVIEWS

Why Marry?

▼▼ *COMMON LAW* gives us once again all the arguments for and against marriage. Miss Constance Bennett who is the modern type, clean at heart as a hound's tooth, but slightly soiled to outside appearances, advances the cause of the common law marriage, at least until the persons to be married are absolutely certain the affections are fixed and steady. Joel McCrea, who swallowed a bitter pill when he learned that Constance had lived with Lew Cody, still wishes to marry her, and the conclusion of the story finds him triumphant. Paul L. Stein directs what is essentially a spoken story with considerable skill, and evolves from the Robert W. Chambers story—which was not quite new even when it was written—a picture that is well above the average.

I can imagine no production more superbly cast than this one. Billed as a Constance Bennett starring vehicle, it has really a dual lead, with the newcomer Joel McCrea sharing full honors with Miss Bennett. We are going to see the time when McCrea is the foremost romantic actor of the screen. He lends a peculiar intensity to his characterizations, and already undoubtedly has gained for himself women fans by the thousand. His personality is a fortunate one, for he is no matinee idol. There is a certain strength about him, and an impression that he has depths which have not yet been plumbed emotionally and intellectually. I like him immensely and I am not going to miss a single picture in the cast of which he is included.

▼▼ THEN AGAIN there is Lew Cody with his genial interpretation of the bounder who is so agreeable that not even an audience can dislike him. When I saw him as the *bon vivant* mixing his salad dressing according to personal taste, I was reminded of the pathetic hero of *The Gay Old Dog*, running down to glittering Loop restaurants in his fading years to mix his own salad dressing before an admiring crew of gold diggers. Robert Williams again portrayed the gentleman who is always a bit rosy. Williams is constantly clever. He is another favorite of mine. With Hedda Hopper and Walter Walker also in the cast, how could *Common Law* have been anything but entertaining?

One bit of moral philosophy afforded me considerable amusement. Miss Bennett, after quarreling with Joel McCrea, runs down to Cannes with the intention of returning to Lew Cody. Conscience twinges, and she returns. McCrea is astounded and pleased. She has not spent the night with Cody, hence she is a very virtuous young woman. I imagine the kiddies will find *Common Law* a bit puzzling, but the rest of us are so used to this sort of thing that when it is done well we are pleased and surprised.

Dressler the Magnificent

▼▼ *POLITICS*. In the midst of a torrid summer the cinematic accompaniments of which have been sex pictures to the seventh extreme, I welcome Marie Dressler, Polly Moran and Roscoe Ates in the breeziest comedy of the season. Nor can I be perfectly certain when I call it a comedy. Miss Dressler is an actress of such capability that she can kill a laugh with a tear and then revive the laugh with a skill possessed by no other person on the screen. There is something universal about her, something magnificent, something fine and altogether human. I have seen her in good pictures and bad ones, but I never have seen her give a performance which I did not enjoy thoroughly.

I think particularly of the scene wherein she goes to her sleeping daughter. She has just returned from the death bed of a girl who has been murdered by gangsters. Reaching home, her first thought is for her own daughter. In utter silence she slips into the room, gazes at the sleeping girl, bites her lip and departs. I guess I am a silly sentimentalist, but my eyes grew moist at the scene, and there were others about me who suffered from the same embarrassment. It was merely Marie Dressler stopping in the midst of comedy to portray genuine emotion. In a moment the house was roaring once more with laughter.

Polly Moran gives a delightful interpretation of an ambitious lady politician. Marie Dressler is her housekeeper who at the last moment snatches the mayoralty nomination from her clutches, and proceeds to direct a campaign which is hilarious and stirring. She routs gangsters, bootleggers and supine politicians with her following of women who, in order to ensure her election, declare a strike on "everything". *Lysistrata* dressed up in current garb, but still *Lysistrata*, for we have the bewildered and eager young wife who has been married only two days, and is rather doubtful about how her husband will take this striking business. Roscoe Ates is excellently cast as the town barber, and a more thoroughly hen-pecked or resentful man never stepped across the screen. Karen Morely and William Bakewell took the juvenile leads, and John Miljan as the gangster chief was sinister and convincing. Charles F. Reisner is the director who must be thanked for this very enjoyable Fox production.

A Star New to Me

▼▼ *ALWAYS GOODBYE* is the most delightful title of the summer, although its use in the body of the story seemed somewhat too constant and a little melodramatic. I can not be at all certain about this picture, because Miss Elissa Landi's personality still has me guessing. I don't know whether or not I like her and her work. Certainly she is not a person about whom a snap judgment lightly may be made. Her personality is as distinctly different from the rest of Hollywood as Miss Garbo's. She is interesting and beautiful, and I am going to spend a lot of time thinking about her. Somehow I feel that she was handled a bit poorly in *Always Goodbye*. It is not a question of whether or not I enjoyed her work, but of whether or not I might have enjoyed it more.

The story deals with Miss Landi's adventures as a young woman who has posed as an heiress until her funds have run out and the repossessors have walked in. This theme is the same as that of *The Man in Possession*, and the idea in back of it seems slightly warped. We see the dear young ladies stating positively that they are not sorry for what they have done. They have had their fling, and are well satisfied. I fancy that their creditors might object to this impulsive attitude. At any rate in both pictures the trustful ones were left holding the bag, and the heroines went gaily on their ways without thought for the poor devils.

Miss Landi, in this instance picked up with Paul Cavanagh, and the two of them set out as man and wife for Lewis Stone's villa on Lake Como, where Cavanagh plans to rob Stone of his diamond collection. Scotland Yard is hot on the trail, and by the time the two adventurers arrive Mr. Stone is fully aware of their evil intentions. In the fade-out Cavanagh escapes after Elissa has foiled him in the diamond theft, and Lewis Stone wins her. It is agreeable, entertaining and improbable stuff, but directors Kenneth MacKenna and William Cameron Menzies have handled it nicely save for the dialogue which is too lengthy and slightly overdone. Mr. Stone handles his part warmly. He is the only actor past middle age who can walk off with the heroine and retain the hearty approval of the audience. It is a Fox picture.

Not Quite There

▼▼ *THE RECKLESS HOUR* features Dorothy Mackaill, whom you will remember also recently had a *Mad Moment*. I didn't see the latter production, but I am going to try to catch it at an outlying house in the hope that it is a better picture than the First National production now in review. The picture is adapted by Robert Lord from Arthur Richman's legitimate play, *Ambush*. It abounds with dialogue, some of which is not so clever, and the plot which it develops naturally is one of the original six, but so little disguised by bright or original treatment that it sags badly. One is likely to leave the theatre and have a perfectly fiendish time trying to recall what the story was about.

The lovely Miss Mackaill walks in and out of scenes, and occasionally Conrad Nagel and Walter Byron, both of whom she considers matrimonial prospects, do likewise. H. B. Warner capably handles the role of Miss Mackaill's father, and Joan Blondell who always is as delightful and refreshing as a sea breeze, furnishes more than her quota of laughs. John Francis Dillon directs this effort which First National advertises as a smashing exposé of modern society. Actually it exposes nothing which is very important, and it is so *declasse* that as news it is at least five years too late. The plot deals with Dorothy's love for Walter Byron, who is a wealthy young no-account. She becomes quite involved with him, but in final desperation she poses for Conrad Nagel, who is an artist, and marries him.

I can not say that *The Reckless Hour* is a profoundly bad picture. At worst it is merely insipid. Too often are audiences leaving motion picture programs with the feeling that their emotions have been aroused over nothing at all. I do not object to this picture in particular, but to the great number of its brothers and sisters as a group. The themes are

inexcusably tawdry and astonishingly trivial. The public is hungry for a spark of vitality, verve, significance. If melodrama will fill the bill, let us by all means have it. But I think it is not melodrama that is required. Sincerity and a genuine problem to be solved—these are the ingredients that are almost completely missing from current attractions.

Piffling Romance

▼▼ *A SON OF INDIA.* Fox has handed an ancient tale to Jacques Feyder and told him to find Ramon Novarro and make a picture. The company insisted, I suspect, that the show brim with romance and tenderness. The result is as utterly insipid a piece of work as I have seen in months. The story is improbable and untimely. Producers show no sense whatever in selecting foreign material. In a period when India is in a ferment that threatens to blow out the safety valve of Asia, we are shown a silly romance about an Indian jewel merchant who falls in love with an American girl and renounces her because of their racial difference. This is a suicidal policy of which Hollywood can not break itself. A weak story may be helped considerably if the material with which it deals is timely. But when a story is both weak and untimely, it is likely to elicit nothing but snores from a vast and weary public.

Madge Evans plays the part of Ramon Novarro's sweetheart, and Conrad Nagel is her virtuous brother, who binds the young Indian to him by a favor, and uses the obligation to induce the jewel merchant to renounce his sister. The story is milked dry. The inter-racial love affair is tawdry and uninteresting in nine out of ten instances. But here Director Feyder tries so hard to put it across that the whole affair is exaggerated. It ends with a dramatic scene of renunciation in Novarro's garden. As a mark of farewell Novarro kneels and kisses Miss Evans's skirt. Such a finale might have been satisfactory in a picture which meant something. But *Son of India* is not strong enough to carry it, and one leaves with the impression that one has been observing some very trivial stuff.

Novarro looks no more like an Indian than El Brendel. His accent seems odd, and the English lines assigned to the rabble of India's millions sound very strange. Marjorie Rambeau gives an excellent performance as Miss Evans's aunt, and conclusively proves that she is not a type character. She is beautiful, charming and gracious. Her performance was a delight, and I hope it will open a road which will lead her away from the hard-boiled roles which have been forced upon her. There is nothing about the entire picture to arouse comment one way or the other.

Disjointed Story

▼▼ *NIGHT NURSE* presents Barbara Stanwyck in a role which does not do her justice. She is an actress of unusual dramatic ability. Flashes of her power were apparent in *The Miracle Woman,* but in this latest picture they are considerably dimmed. Miss Stanwyck is not a doll-faced beauty, and to the vast audiences which her pictures must reach, doll-faced beauty can be supplanted only by a genuinely dramatic situation. Columbia and Warner Brothers and whosoever else uses her must realize that on the screen she is essentially an intelligent woman, and assist her in securing such parts as will exploit so unusual a virtue.

It is all very well for Miss Stanwyck to rush about saving starving babies and thwarting such villainous chauffeurs as Clark Gable in their attempts to snatch the children's trust fund, but not for one moment was I in doubt that she would win her battle. Not doubting, I felt no particular interest in her efforts. The triumph of virtue must be much more difficult than it was in *Night Nurse* before I begin grabbing my seat. Joan Blondell, who is turning in more efficient characterizations than any featured player in Hollywood, functioned admirably as Miss Stanwyck's wise-cracking colleague. I was glad to see her in such a role. An aura of inspired consecration has been placed about the brows of all nurses, and most of it is tosh. I see no reason why a nurse should view her profession with any more gravity than a stenographer or a shop girl. Work, after all, is merely work. Ben Lyon takes the part of an amiable gangster bootlegger. He is spared close-ups, in consequence of which I enjoyed his work more than I usually do, but his role is much too small. Charles Winninger, Charlotte Merriam and Ralfe Harolde carry the other principal roles.

I think that William Wellman should not be blamed for the disunion of *Night Nurse.* He was given a script which did not begin to be interesting until it was half finished. The story dealt with Miss Stanwyck's efforts to save two children from a conspiracy, yet the children did not enter the story until well toward the middle. The earlier sequences, while mildly entertaining, were absolutely unnecessary. Too much time was devoted to Miss Stanwyck's training, and not enough to her accomplishments. One of the children shocked me by using the word "horrid". I never have heard a child of three or four years resort to so elegant a word, and I don't think it natural. The rottenest dialogue in Hollywood is that intended to proceed from infant lips. There are some good action shots and a great deal of unnecessary conversation in a picture which stands in need of as much assistance as possible.

Weak and Dull

▼▼ *HUSH MONEY.* I was talking about this picture after I had seen it. My friend asked what it was about. "It deals with a girl who went to prison, came out and reformed, married a wealthy man, and ——". My friend interrupted me. "And was hounded for money by her former criminal associates, who probably took jewelry that her husband had given her, and which she had to wear to some important function." My friend was perfectly right. The plot has been handled since the first cave man learned the meaning of indiscretion and the importance of a past. It is ancient, mouldy, miserable. With stark genius handling such stuff it would be dull. With Miss Joan Bennett and Mr. Hardie Albright, who have not yet been accused of possessing absolute genius, the affair is quite awful.

Never, I think, has Hollywood stood in greater need of a spark of originality. The themes with which the town overflows are so antique that they creak, so utterly unimportant that they lull an audience to sleep, and so stupid when considered from a standpoint of wide popular appeal that they are lucky to have anybody to view them. *Hush Money* was another story that didn't begin until thirty minutes after it had started. Miss Bennett sinned, paid for her sin, and began her struggle for redemption. The interest in the story did not begin until she was confronted with the problem of whether or not to tell her husband. But that was along toward the middle of the picture. The audience was treated to all the trivialities of her early offense when they could have been handled in perhaps a half dozen suggestive shots. This is Hollywood's heritage from a stage which has as its most honorable rule the development of complications in act two. A motion picture is not divided into acts. It is an instrument of high dramatic possibilities, and should open at an intensely interesting point.

When we chase the last survivors of the legitimate stage out of town, we may, within a period of three to seven years, rid ourselves of their influence and once again make pictures that are interesting.

▼▼ I NEVER SHALL forgive the dialogue writers for the lines which Miss Bennett utters when she learns that she is to spend a year in prison. "Another year," breathes the young lady, "another April!" Then follows a shot of budding blossoms. I wanted to scream. There was no intelligent reason for the inclusion of the line. It was unnatural and stilted. It was moony and trashy. It displayed the lengths to which the dialogue writer was willing to go to save something which was beyond redemption.

The work of Miss Bennett and Mr. Albright is mediocre and undistinguished. Owen Moore makes a good crook, and Myrna Loy is an excellent mate for him. Douglas Cosgrove proves once more that he possesses one of the most pleasing personalities on the screen, and C. Henry Gordon was so villainous that I hung upon his entrances. Only one thing about *Hush Money* is outstanding. Director Sidney Lanfield managed to produce an ending that ranks, in my mind, as one of the most brilliant of the year. It is completely silent. And so good that it will probably save a very characterless production.

Elaborate Mystery

▼▼ *MURDER BY THE CLOCK* is a splendid piece of impossible mystery. It has everything that should go into a good murder story, with secret passages, moving tombstones, bone-crushing idiots, eerie grave signals, walking dead people, and at least three grade A killings. Edward Sloman has combined these ghastly ingredients with a good cast, excellent settings and a degree of logic that throws an audience wholeheartedly into an improbable situation. The result is a mystery picture that is distinctly above the average. A great deal of the credit should go to Lilyan Tashman for as cold and glittering a performance as I have seen in a long while. She forces a series of men to fall in love with her, and then has them kill each other with consummate skill. Personally I would just as soon fall in love with an unsheathed knife as with Miss Tashman in her current role. Perhaps the dresses she wears account for her charms. They are skin tight and beautiful. If it were not in bad taste I would make a suggestion about concealing some of her more intimate curves. But no gentleman would say such things and I am still a gentleman.

Irving Pichel plays the idiot son of Blanche Frederici to a terrifying degree of perfection. An audience of vulgarians tittered at some of his actions, but the picture wasn't made for vulgarians, so their reactions are unimportant. William Boyd does well enough as the doubting lieutenant who finally solves the case, although by no means am I convinced that his proof was sufficient for conviction. The story ends with Miss Tashman's arrest. Lester Vail, Regis Toomey and Sally O'Neil furnish some interesting moments.

Sound effects are worked cleverly into the story, and the hooting of the grave alarm which the old woman installed to insure herself against premature burial had me creepy. A clock ticked most of the time and emphasized the eerie exactitude with which the murders were committed. I didn't like the line wherein Toomey dramatically stated that this was a case of "murder by the clock" Whenever the title of a picture appears in the dialogue it is given such emphasis that the audience is almost commanded to note its importance. And anyhow the phrase is nothing but a story teller's idea for a title, and not a legitimate part of dialogue. I rather think that we are going to have some insufferable mystery and detective tales for fall consumption, but I have no complaint against this one.

Another Rogers Picture

▼▼ *YOUNG AS YOU FEEL* is a fair bit of entertainment which should have been a great deal better. With Will Rogers, Fifi Dorsay, Lucien Littlefield working under the direction of Frank Borzage and having at their back the production facilities of Fox, one has a right to expect more. The story is from George Ade's stage play, *Father and the Boys*. The theme, which is one of old age suddenly becoming youthful, is at least ten years behind the times. In 1920 there might have been enough novelty in the sight of an old codger like Rogers running wild, but to-day the spectacle can inspire only the faintest sort of a smile.

I have seen three Fox pictures this week. Two of them are adapted from stage plays, one from a novel. None of them is successful, although *Young as You Feel* is the best of the lot. This should mean something, but I doubt if the producers can understand precisely what it is. Most of the plays that are being filmed are old ones. Their plots have been revealed to hundreds of thousands. Their novelty is gone. The organization that tries to produce them places itself under a heavy handicap, for the staleness of the plot must be compensated for by originality and skill of treatment. Originality and skill of treatment are things unknown to Hollywood, and the result is mediocrity. An original script would at least possess the advantage of being new to the public.

But I was not bored with this Rogers picture. Nothing in which the inimitable humorist appears can be dull. I have forgotten most of the situations by now, and a week from now probably will have forgotten the whole affair. But while I sat in the theatre I was mildly entertained, and somewhat puzzled as to the reason why Mr. Rogers was used in such an affair. The story had one wildly improbable situation, when Rogers held off two Federal officers with warrants while he blackmailed a swindler out of forty thousand dollars. The money forthcoming, the officers went their way, and presumably the warrants were cancelled by a genial and obliging Federal government. Really such things are not done—no, not even for Will Rogers.

Seal Hunters

▼▼ *THE VIKING*, which I viewed in the new Hughes-Franklin Studio theatre, is that epic of the north which cost the lives of twenty-six men when the staunch old craft which transported the company went to the bottom as the result of an explosion of undetermined origin. It is a completely fascinating account of the seal hunters and the unbelievable ardors which accompany their

sagas. A thin story runs through the picture, and it is handled satisfactorily enough, but the offering is valuable chiefly for its interpretation of a life which for hardship and toil is utterly unfamiliar to more southern latitudes.

I would not welcome a succession of such pictures, but one of them is a relief. The story is naturally one of physical stamina, and the love element is clean and conventional. I take it that the northern latitudes do not make for intrigue and sophistication. Even the dialogue is in keeping with the picture. The only distasteful thing about the production was the exploitation it received. "Twenty-six Men Died" assured the billboards, in order that the picture might be shown. When I think of that sudden explosion, of gaping wounds filled with the brine of the sea, of fire and smoke and suffocation in the engine room, I am inclined to believe that other and even more effective methods of exploitation might have been used.

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Crowding the Band Wagon

(Continued from Page 21)

of clippings, some of which will appear from issue to issue in these pages. And the tragedy is that the substance of them appeared in this magazine at least two years ago.

There is only one out for the critical and wditing gentlemen who have thus been so badly beaten at the post. The old critic-creator argument can be raised. It is being raised, and strenuously. Jack Alicoate mentions in his *Film Daily* that if Mr. Beaton ever decides to make a motion picture, it had better be a good one. Contributors write into the office urging that the editor vindicate his writings and really produce pictures. Bob Wagner unceremoniously calls him a nut. Mr. Wagner should remember that nuts have two advantages over most of the other products of the vegetable kingdom; they are notoriously difficult to crack, and when cracked they are generally quite nutritious. Personally I have no idea whether the gentleman who pays my grocery bills can make good pictures or not. It appears to me to be somewhat beside the point. He has called the hand of the industry with uncanny accuracy for some years. He will continue doing it in the future. He is doubtless as good a critic of eggs as of motion pictures. I doubt not at all that he can discover a rotten egg when it is served up to him, and explain precisely what made the egg rotten and what could have been done to keep it good. But what man among us will demand that he publicly lay an egg in order to vindicate his opinion?

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Reviewed in this Number

ALWAYS GOODBYE—

A Fox picture. Directed by William Cameron Menzies and Kenneth MacKenna; story by Kate McLaurin; continuity and dialogue by Lynn Starling; photographed by Arthur Edeson; recording engineer, Joe Aiken; art director, William Darling; associate producer, John W. Considine, Jr.

The cast: Elissa Landi, Lewis Stone, Paul Cavanagh, John Garrick, Beryl Mercer, Frederick Kerr, Herbert Bunston, Lumsden Hare.

BAD GIRL—

A Fox picture. Directed by Frank Borzage; from the novel by Vina Delmar; continuity and dialogue by Edwin Burke; photographed by Chester Lyons; recording engineer, G. P. Costello; art director, William Darling; film editor, Margaret Clancy.

The cast: Sally Eilers, James Dunn, Minna Gombell, William Pawley, Frank Darien.

BLACK CAMEL—

A Fox picture. Directed by Hamilton MacFadden; from the novel by Earl Derr Biggers; adaptation by Hugh Stange; screen play and dialogue by Barry Connors and Philip Klein; photographed by Joe August and Dan Clark; recording engineer, W. W. Lindsay, Jr.; assistant director, Sam Wurtzel; settings by Ben Carré; associate producer, William Sistrom.

The cast: Warner Oland, Sally Eilers, Bela Lugosi, Dorothy Revier, Victor Varconi, Robert Young, Marjorie White, Richard Tucker, J. M. Kerrigan, Mary Gordon, C. Henry Gordon, Violet Dunn, William Post, Dwight Frye, Murray Kinnell, Otto Yamaoka, Rita Roselle.

CHILDREN OF DREAMS—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Alan Crosland; story and adaptation by Sigmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein; photographed by James Van Trees; film editor, Harold McLernon.

The cast: Margaret Shilling, Paul Gregory, Tom Patricola, Bruce Winston, Charles Winninger, Marion Byron.

COMMON LAW—

An RKO-Pathé picture. Directed by Paul L. Stein; from the novel by Robert W. Chambers; screen play by John Farrow; dialogue by Horace Jackson; photographed by Hal Mohr; art director, Carrol Clark; musical director, Arthur Lange; recording engineers, Earl Wolcott and J. Grubb; costume designer, Gwen Wakeling; film editor, Charles Craft; a Charles R. Rogers production; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown.

The cast: Constance Bennett, Joel McCrea, Lew Cody, Robert Williams, Hedda Hopper, Marion Shilling, Paul Ellis, Walter Walker.

HUCKLEBERRY FINN—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Norman Taurog; from the book by Mark Twain; screen play by Grover Jones and William Slavens McNutt; photographed by David Abel.

The cast: Jackie Coogan, Junior Durkin, Mitzi Green, Jackie Searl, Clarence Muse, Clara Blandick, Jane Darwell, Eugene Pallette, Oscar Apfel, Warner Richmond, Charlotte V. Henry, Doris Short, Lillian Harmer, Cecil Weston, Guy Oliver, Aileen Manning, Frank McGlynn.

HUSH MONEY—

A Fox picture. Directed by Sidney Lanfield; story and adaptation by Philip Klein and Courtney Terrett; dialogue by Dudley Nichols;

photographed by John Seitz; recording engineer, E. C. Ward.

The cast: Joan Bennett, Hardie Albright, Owen Moore, Myrna Loy, C. Henry Gordon, Douglas Cosgrove, George Byron, André Cheron, Henry Armetta, George Irving, Nella Walker, Joan Castle.

LE MILLION—

A Tobis (Paris, France) picture. Directed by René Clair.

The cast: Annabella, René Lefebre, Louis Allibert, Paul Ollivier, Vanda Greville, Constantin Stroesco, Odette Talazac.

MAGNIFICENT LIE—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Berthold Viertel; based on *Laurels and the Lady* by Leonard Merrick; screen play by Vincent Lawrence and Samson Raphaelson; photographed by Charles Lang.

The cast: Ruth Chatterton, Ralph Bellamy, Stuart Erwin, Françoise Rosay, Sam Hardy, Charles Boyer, Tyler Brooke, Tyrrell Davis, Joan Del Val.

MURDER BY THE CLOCK—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Edward Sloman; from the story by Rufus King and the play by Charles Beahan; adaptation by Henry Myers; photographed by Karl Struss.

The cast: William Boyd, Lilyan Tashman, Irving Pichel, Regis Toomey, Sally O'Neil, Blanche Frederici, Walter McGrail, Lester Vail, Martha Maddox, Frank Sheridan, Frederick Sullivan, Willard Robertson, Charles D. Brown, John Rogers, Lenita Lane, Harry Burgess.

NIGHT ANGEL—

A Paramount picture. Directed and written by Edmund Goulding; photographed by William Steiner.

The cast: Nancy Carroll, Fredric March, Phoebe Foster, Alison Skipworth, Alan Hale.

NIGHT NURSE—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by William Wellman; based on the novel by Dora Macy; adaptation by Oliver H. P. Garrett; dialogue by Charles Kenyon; photographed by Chick McGill; assistant director, Frank Shaw; art director, Max Parker; film editor, Dr. McDermott.

The cast: Barbara Stanwyck, Ben Lyon, Joan Blondell, Blanche Frederici, Charles Winninger, Robert Gleckler, Edward Nugent, Clark Gable, Vera Lewis, Charlotte Merriam, Betty May, Walter McGrail, Marcia Mae Jones, Marilyn Harris.

POLITICS—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Charles F. Reisner; story by Robert E. Hopkins; adaptation by Wells Root; dialogue by Zelda Sears and Malcolm Stuart Boylan; photographed by Clyde De Vinna; recording engineer, Paul Neal; film editor, William S. Gray.

The cast: Marie Dressler, Polly Moran, Roscoe Ates, Karen Morley, William Bakewell, John Miljan, Joan Marsh, Tom McGuire, Kane Richmond, Mary Alden.

RECKLESS HOUR—

A First National picture. Directed by John Francis Dillon; story by Arthur Richman; adaptation and dialogue by Robert Lord; photographed by James Van Trees; film editor, Harold Young.

The cast: Dorothy Mackaill, Conrad Nagel, Joan Blondell, H. B. Warner, Walter Byron, Helen Ware, Joe Donahue, William House, Dorothy Peterson, Ivan Simpson, Claude King, Mae Madison.

SILENCE—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Louis Gasnier and Max Marcin; story by Max Marcin; photographed by Charles Rosher.

The cast: Clive Brook, Marjorie Rambeau, Peggy Shannon, Charles Starrett, Willard Robertson, John Wray, Frank Sheridan, Paul Nicholson, John Craig, J. M. Sullivan, Charles Trowbridge, Ben Taggart, Wade Boteler, Robert Homans.

SON OF INDIA—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Jacques Feyder; from the story by Marion Crawford; scenarist, Ernest Vajda; dialogue by Ernest Vajda, John Meehan and Claudine West; photographed by Harold Rosson; recording engineer, Robert Shirley; film editor, Conrad A. Nervig.

The cast: Ramon Novarro, Conrad Nagel, Marjorie Rambeau, Madge Evans, C. Aubrey Smith, Mitchell Lewis, John Miljan, Nigel de Brulier.

YOUNG AS YOU FEEL—

A Fox-Movietone picture. Directed by Frank Borzage; based on the play, *Father and the Boys*, by George Ade; adapted by Edwin Burke; photographed by Chester Lyons; recording engineer, P. J. Costello; assistant director, Lew Borzage; art director, Jack Schulze; costumes by Sophie Wachner.

The cast: Will Rogers, Fifi Dorsay, Lucien Littlefield, Donald Dillaway, Terrance Ray, Lucille Browne, Rosalie Roy, C. Henry Gordon, John T. Murray, Brandon Hurst, Marcia Harris, Otto Hoffman, Joan Standing, Gregory Gaye.

Studious Ignorance

(By Philip K. Scheuer in Los Angeles Times)

If talking pictures are in the doldrums one of the reasons is that montage has not been applied to them. The coming of sound, with its staggering opportunities for montage application as counterpoint to photography and cutting, has been almost studiously ignored by Hollywood. If this seems an absurd statement—the producers will instantly point to the fact that they have *recorded* practically every known noise, and heaven knows the talkies talk enough—it will sound strangest of all to those who, as we have seen, have never heard of montage at all. They do not realize that by learning a little about the business they are engaged in—even if they never actually reach the point of calling it by names from the French—they could have audiences up on their feet, yelling and stamping and cheering once again, as they did when Barthelmess rescued La Gish from the very edge of a thunderous cataract in a silent picture fifteen years ago.

Church and Cinema

(By Gillette in Film Daily)

There is no more justification for the church to expect the screen—an industry that someone else developed at tremendous cost and in the face of religious opposition all along the line—to be utilized for the advancement of their ends, however worthy, than there would be in expecting the railroads or the utilities of the country to do the same thing.

When the motion picture was struggling to make something of itself, the churches were among those who booted it around from pillar to post.

Now that it is somebody, they are anxious to annex its influence.

Advertisements

(Daily Film Renter, London)

This last week, in two films from America, there were flagrant ads, in one case for Lux and the other for Flit. At least, if they weren't ads, and paid for as such, I can not conceive why the producers dwelt so lovingly on close-ups of the packets and labels in both cases. I can recall, comparatively recently, the introduction, by similar methods, of the name plate on a radio set, and, in another film a verbal boost—indirect but clever—for a make of car which was worth hundreds of pounds, whether they were actually paid or not.

Hollywood Dawn

(By Harold Weight in Hollywood Filmograph)

The screen can never compete with the stage in the matter of dialogue; and the stage can not compete with the screen in the field of action. People go to the two for different types of entertainment. They go to the legitimate theatre to hear the characters. The same audiences go to the motion picture to see the characters. They want action, scenery, flashing shots such as the stage can not give them. Talking pictures can't change that demand, nor can dialogue replace it; although sound can enhance the attraction.

Saving Youth!

EVERY WOMAN CAN HAVE
A BEAUTIFUL SKIN!

THE SUPERLATIVE PRODUCT
OF A CHEMIST'S ART!

ESTHER RALSTON'S

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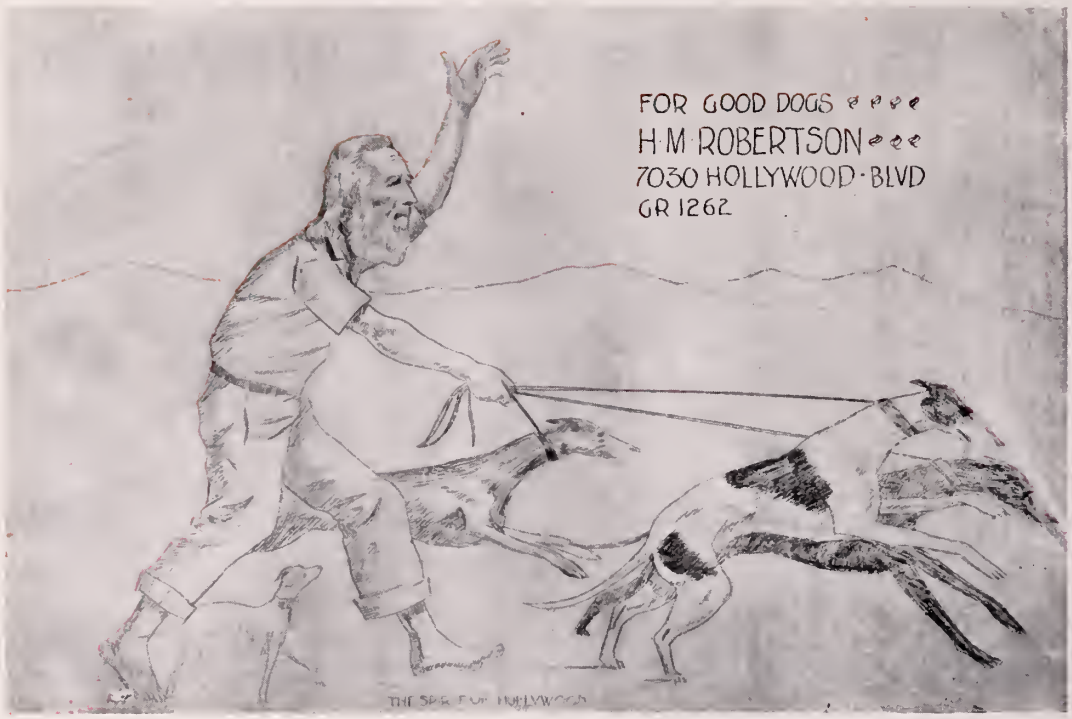

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HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

SEPT. 12, 1931

Sherwood on New York And Hollywood

What Has Metro to be Snooty About?

A Little More About Unit Production

Throwing Sand in Hollywood's Face

Reviewed in This Number

BOUGHT	SILENCE
THE SPIDER	AGE FOR LOVE
GREAT LOVER	HARD HOMBRE
STREET SCENE	MIRACLE WOMAN
TRANSATLANTIC	SPORTING BLOOD
MOTHER AND SON	MONKEY BUSINESS
MERELY MARY ANN	AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY
WOMEN GO ON FOREVER	SECRETS OF A SECRETARY

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My Dear Welford—

Your new Spectator looks so good that I've simply got to spend a hundred bucks "For no reason at all"—EDDIE PEABODY

Thanks Eddie, Here it is—W. B.

The Editor's Views

Things in General

WHEN WE BEGIN to estimate the general situation of the film industry we start with the fact that the box-office has demonstrated that something is wrong. We can't argue ourselves out of that, nor can producers dodge the blame for it. All over the country every other form of entertainment is having the greatest summer in a decade or more. In Hollywood, where motion picture houses have had a tough time of it, the Bowl Symphony concerts and the Pilgrimage Play had the most successful season in their careers. Baseball never did such business as it has done this year. The additional profits that the other amusements are making now represent the money that the public formerly paid to see motion pictures. Film producers, not baseball itself, are responsible for the extra profit baseball is making.

It is rather a pitiful spectacle that Hollywood makes of itself as it gropes blindly for a way out—pitiful because it reveals such an astonishing ignorance of the business it is in. If producers had any knowledge of what made motion pictures popular in the first place, they soon could restore prosperity at the box-office. But they don't, and won't allow anyone to tell them. Motion picture executives have better opinions of themselves, with less reason for it, than have executives of any other important industry in the country. Their self-complacency, tremendous egoism and blind ignorance have ruined the picture business, and the process of ruin will continue until we have a new set of executives, for it is past belief that the present set will learn.

▼▼ HOWEVER, the rest of us can. Let us see if we can figure out what is the matter, and then hunt up a remedy for the ills we find.

In the day of silent pictures we used to go "to the movies." It didn't make much difference what house we dropped into, providing we had not seen the feature picture before. We could find a comfortable seat; the story flitted by on the screen, soft music was played, and the whole experience was peaceful, soothing and restful. If it was a poor picture, if the story did not interest us much, it mattered little, as we could listen to the music and think about something else. When we left the theatre we felt that we had had our money's worth, and if we were asked how we liked the picture we were likely to give it a friendly boost. It took a mighty bad picture to stir us into adverse criticism.

What about to-day? The program opens explosively with the loud music that heralds the newsreel; comedians yell at one another in a two-reeler; throughout the feature shadows tell in words that we must listen to the stories that we used to get with our eyes. Peace and quiet have departed from motion picture houses; their restfulness has taken wings, and, if we don't like them, we can not dismiss the pictures from our minds, for they assail both our eyes and ears and present no alleviating distraction in the way of music. The pictures irritate us and challenge our criticism, and when we leave the theatre, more tired than when we went in, we are in no mood to encourage others to go in. The next Sunday afternoon we go to the ball game.

▼▼ JUST TO KEEP you from losing sight of the main premise —that something serious has happened to pictures—let me quote from a recent issue of the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*. Discussing the alarming falling off in motion picture theatre attendance, it says: "The decrease in business is not the usual summer slackening. It is more than a seasonal drop. It is serious enough to have caused some 120 houses in this city to have closed down altogether." While attendance at baseball games in Philadelphia is breaking all records, the attendance at picture houses is so small that scores of them are closing.

There is nothing remarkable in the situation. Anyone with any knowledge of the fundamentals of screen art could foresee it. I take no credit for the fact that two and a half years ago I stated in the *Spectator* what was going to happen, and gave the reasons that made it inevitable. I merely took screen art apart to see what it was made of, did a little reading on mind, imagination and memory, and the visual and aural senses, and no other conclusions were possible. With mathematical accuracy the path that pictures were taking was charted far ahead, and they still are going in the same direction because those who control their making are incapable mentally of understanding what kind of business it is. But there are some

WELFORD BEATON, EDITOR VOL 12, NO. 7 ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, ASSOCIATE
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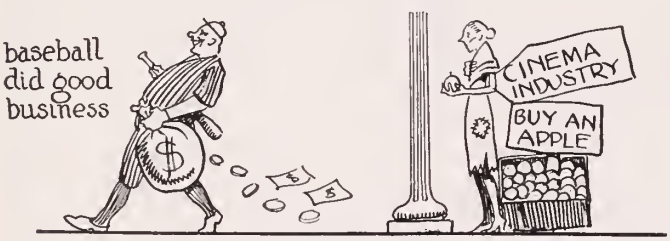
things, surely, that producers should be able to get into their heads.

▼▼ IF THE FINANCIAL position of the industry could be brought to approximate that of the average silent years, motion pictures again would be prosperous. In an effort to achieve this end, why not approximate the conditions that made film finances satisfactory when all pictures were silent? Somewhere about here all the producers will chirp up with, "But in their last two years silent pictures were dying on their feet." True, but it was because of the fact that producers had gone dead from the neck up, and not on account of any inherent weakness of the silent picture as an entertainment medium. I don't wish to argue this point now, but I put it in here to keep producers from interrupting us by bringing it up later.

To approximate the conditions that prevailed in the silent days peace, quiet and music must come back to picture houses. To bring them back producers and exhibitors must recover their sanity. They must awaken to the fact that the screen has not gone stage. They must realize that it is dialogue, injected into an art in which it is an alien element, that has closed the hundred and twenty houses in Philadelphia and seven thousand more in other parts of the country. They must cease their childish prattle about pictures being poor and the necessity for better ones. Granting the legitimacy of the present formula, Hollywood is turning out better pictures than at any other time in its history. It is the formula that the public is repudiating, not the product fashioned on it. Producers and exhibitors and that blight on screen art, film salesmen, must have a mental house-cleaning.

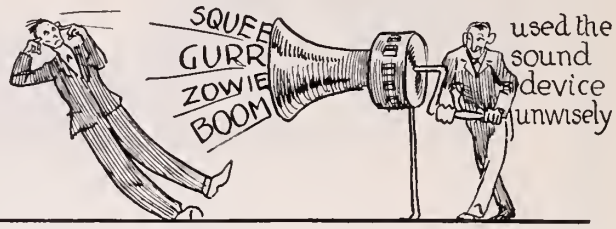
▼▼ PRODUCERS MUST realize by this time that they have used the sound device unwisely. They should retrace their steps and start at the beginning again. If they know anything at all about their business they know that the screen offered the public the first moving entertainment that it could view in



silence, and that motion pictures became the greatest entertainment force in the world. Is there any producer unwise enough to assert that an art in which silence was a fundamental weakness could have assumed such tremendous proportions? Could anything with a flaw in it go so far?

It would seem, therefore, that the thing for producers to do is to restore the conditions that prevailed in the silent days and to use the sound device only to accentuate those conditions, not to annihilate them as is being done now. In previous *Spectators* I have dealt with the subject fully, but I will repeat this much: Screen stories should be told with the camera, which automatically will reduce dialogue to its correct proportions; all pictures should have synchronized scores.

But that is not going to make conditions perfect. They never will be perfect until unit production prevails in all studios, until only those with picture brains have contact with pictures in the making. Unit production is the only thing that will cure at once both the artistic and economic ills of pictures. One of the weaknesses of the present situation is that not half the money spent on production gets on the screen. The big organizations at the beginning of a season announce grandly that they are going to spend a stupendous amount of money on production. One third of the sum is put into personal



pockets for what humorously are called salaries; another third is sacrificed to the incompetency of those who get the first third, and the remainder gets on the screen.

▼▼ I WILL SAY this for producers: it is only artistically that they short-change the exhibitor. In their financial transactions with him they are on the square. The three-thirds is charged to production; the whole amount is pro-rated among the pictures that are made, and the exhibitor is asked to foot the entire bill. As the whole sum was intended for the exhibitor in the first place, it seems right that he should repay all of it, even if two-thirds of it never quite reaches him.

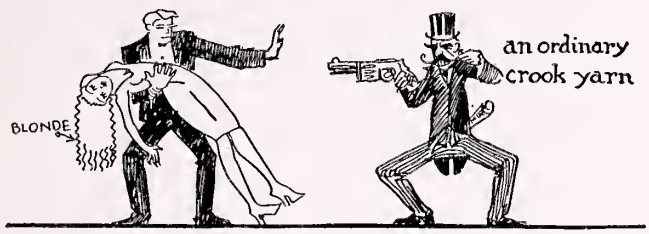
The chief business of the big organizations to-day is the operation of motion picture theatres. RKO alone has two hundred million dollars' worth of theatres, but it, unlike the others, has its own vaudeville circuit to keep its houses open. If it depended on the pictures it makes most of its houses would have to close. More and more all the time will it become apparent to these big theatre companies that their only way out is to limit their activities to their main interests and to employ experts to make their pictures.

Is the Story Important?

SEVERAL TIMES I have said in the *Spectator* that the story is not an element of great importance to a motion picture, and each time I said it I brought down on myself the derisive guffaws of those who think they know all there is to know about the screen. To them the story is the whole thing, but if we took all the things that have harmed the screen and isolated the one that has harmed it most, I think we would find it to be the mistaken idea that prevails in studios that the story is the most important element in a screen creation. Stories have assumed an important place in studio affairs because the executives who select them for production lack that pictorial sense which permits them to see a motion picture as they read a story, and must be excited, thrilled, amused or saddened by what they find on paper. The failure of the executives to recognize the suitability of material for the screen has deprived pictures of a vast store of literature from which film masterpieces could be made.

It is not the story itself that is the important thing in a motion picture. It is the treatment accorded whatever story there is.

▼▼ BEFORE THE guffaws rise again to mask the vacant minds behind them, let me point to one studio that has proved amply the truth of my contention. When Frank Borzage started to make *Bad Girl* for Fox he had a story trivial in theme, trivial in characterization and trivial in incident, yet he made from this frail material one of the finest pictures of the year. Henry King, another Fox director, took a story that in its essentials is absurd and sickly sentimental, one that was written originally to fit the emotions of a past generation, and made it into the superb picture that is *Merely Mary Ann*. William K. Howard, Fox again, had a cheap melodrama for his story material when he set about making *Transatlantic*, an ordinary crook yarn that combined all the threadworn ingredients that have been used a thousand times; and from this



material he has made a picture that entertains the masses and appeals to the highest intelligences that approach motion pictures.

Each of these pictures has everything to make it a big box-office success, yet none of them has a story that in itself amounts to anything. As we view the pictures we think the stories are important because so skilful is the treatment accorded them by the able directors, that we attach importance to an incident that really would be of no importance if stripped of the illusion of reality given it by the expert direction. The story on the screen is what holds our attention; as we view the picture it is the all-important thing, but *it becomes important only after it has been made into a motion picture, and it gets its importance solely from the treatment accorded it by the director*. As raw material, as something on paper before shooting begins, the story is not important.

▼▼ THERE ARE NOT more than a dozen directors in Hollywood who could have been permitted to make these stories into pictures. Because Winnie Sheehan has recovered from his obsession that the screen had gone stage when it acquired the sound device, he has returned to the business of making motion pictures. Borzage, King and Howard have proven their ability to make motion pictures. No doubt each of them selected the story he wanted to do and Sheehan allowed him to go ahead without supervision or any other variety of pernicious interference.

And there, my sisters, you have unit production.

The film industry can twist and turn as it will; it can exercise the greatest ingenuity in figuring how to get out of its financial distress; it can resort to every device that suggests itself, but prosperity will return to pictures only when unit production is the rule in all the big studios.

▼▼ UNIT PRODUCTION, in essence, means permitting one mind to express itself on the screen. Borzage expresses himself in *Bad Girl*, King expresses himself in *Merely Mary Ann*, and Howard in *Transatlantic*, and each is a very fine picture *because its director wanted to do it*. When we have unit production a director will not be allowed to do everything he wants to do, but he will not be asked to do anything that he does not want to do. Most of our pictures are very bad because directors are forced to do stories that they don't want to do. Can you imagine the intelligent, sympathetic director who made such a beautiful job of *Tom Sawyer*, wanting to do a thing like *Vice Squad?* Some day John Cromwell's right to select his own material will be recognized, and then he will give us only *Tom Sawyers*.

Talk with any director for fifteen minutes and he will tell you of several stories that he always has wanted to do. I mean here directors whose records entitle them to consideration and their judgment to respect. Many of them have told me how they tried to interest producers in the stories they wanted to do, but in the end had to do the stories the producers selected. I can understand this. Each director sees a picture in the story he likes; he can not make a producer see it, consequently it is lost to the screen. But when producers develop sufficient brains they will accept the assurance of directors that there are pictures in certain material and will allow the directors to make them. That means unit production.

Motion

THIS FROM a correspondent who signs no name to his or her letter: "You say that characters moving about a room in a dialogue scene contribute no real motion to a picture if the dialogue is carrying the story. You even go so far as to say that such movement serves to retard the filmic motion. Do you mean by that that characters always should remain still while speaking lines? I mean, of course, when the lines are telling the story."

As people move about while conversing in real life, I can see no reason why they should remain still while conversing on the screen. More than that of any other art is the screen's mission to present us with life as it really is. The point I raised in my comment that prompts the letter is that the movement referred to is not motion in the filmic sense. That there should be more action in pictures is agreed generally. The pub-

In The Next Spectator

A pungent article by the editor on the necessity of deflating and debunking Hollywood, with a frank discussion of the follies committed by the film producing organizations.

Also some comments upon the sacred regard that producers have for contracts and the futility of Hollywood's efforts to make motion picture stars.

Robert E. Sherwood, writing from New York, contributes some of his scintillating comments, and Dalton Trumbo provides some entertaining thoughts on various subjects.

Among the reviews that will appear in the next issue will be those of the following pictures:

Caught	*Street Scene*
Star Witness	*Hush Money*
Guilty Hands	*East of Borneo*
Waterloo Bridge	*Public Defender*
Homicide Squad	*Too Many Cooks*
Traveling Husbands	*Murder at Midnight*

lic has grown tired of having to listen to its screen stories, with the result that attendance at film theatres has fallen off to a degree that has made alarming the financial condition of the industry. The cry for more action to alleviate box-office pains has been answered by directors in the wrong way. They answer by moving their actors in order that the camera can present animated scenes. The animation of actors does nothing to animate the story if the actors are telling it in conversation. What the public demands is that a greater portion of the stories be told by the camera. My previous comments were

prompted by a desire to point this out, and I argued that moving characters does not mean motion in the cinematic sense, as producers and directors seem to think it does.

▼▼ EVEN IN PICTURES that recognize the fundamentals of screen art to the extent of telling their stories almost entirely with the camera, there will have to be spots in which the stories must be advanced by spoken lines that serve as substitutes for the titles that prevailed in silent pictures. During these dialogue passages which carry the story in the lines that are spoken, no suggestion of forward visual motion is given by having the characters moving about a room; but if directors employ even ordinary intelligence, such suggestion can be provided. Let me illustrate by describing a scene I saw recently in some picture, just which one I can not recall.

A, in dinner clothes, calls at B's apartment. He finds B, also dressed for dinner, waiting to go out with him. Before they leave the apartment together it is essential that they put over in dialogue where they are going and why. While they are doing this they fiddle around, rise and sit down again, cross the room and do all the other things which directors think contribute motion to their story, but which anyone with even an elementary knowledge of screen art knows do nothing of the sort. There is nothing in the scene to indicate when it is going to end, no progressive movement, nothing that the eyes of the audience can be employed in looking for. The physical motion that we see is absolutely meaningless. It would have been easy to have introduced motion that meant something.

Suppose A had found B in the early stage of dressing. "I'll be ready in a little while," says B. He affixes the studs in his shirt, puts the shirt on, then his collar, tie, and the rest of it, and all the time he and A are putting over the story. With this treatment we have physical action that means something and which eliminates the impression that the dialogue is retarding the action. We know that when B finishes dressing, the two will set out on their adventure, and we watch the progress of the dressing because we know it is leading to something definite. Throughout the sequence there is a forward movement that means something even though all the story value of the sequence is carried in the dialogue that is spoken while the dressing progresses.

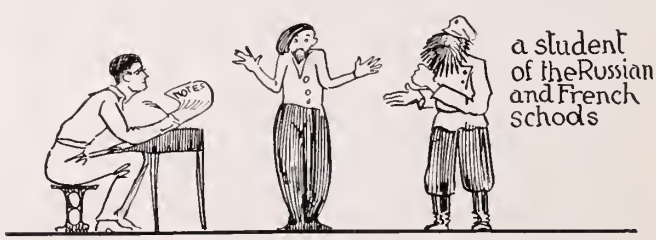
▼▼ HENRY KING in *Merely Mary Ann* plants the background of Charlie Farrell, the importance of his family, his college life and his ambitions, in a dialogue sequence with G. P. Huntley, Jr., and so adroitly does he do it that I've forgotten what he did. When I began this paragraph I expected to state in it the method that King employed, but it was so trivial and unobvious that I can't recall it. All I remember is that while viewing it I was conscious of the skill with which the director put over his story in dialogue while at the same time maintaining a definite forward movement that concealed the fact that the story had stopped while we were being told what had happened before it opened. In *Transatlantic* William K. Howard keeps things moving while dialogue is being spoken, the movement being handled in a way that suggests that it is more important than what is being said, although the reverse is true because in such scenes the lines are carrying all the story.

When producers allow directors to use their brains in making their pictures, all the dialogue will be sugar-coated so successfully with forward-moving filmic motion that it will be much easier to take than it is in the huge and stupid doses in which it is being administered now.

Everything but Box-Office

KING VIDOR is perhaps America's bravest director. He is not afraid to try anything. Both in the selection of his stories and the treatment he accords them, he wanders further afield and takes greater chances technically and with the box-office than any other director. Vidor never makes an uninteresting picture, nor does he always make successful ones. His pioneering, however, his restless reaching out for something new, his striving for an impressive camera effect, for a bit of lighting that is different and effective, make him the leader in the development of screen art in America. Obviously he is a student of the Russian and French schools and is influenced by both, but more strongly by the former. In his latest picture, *Street Scene*, there are some of those striking shots that we find only in Russian films, and throughout the production his composition and lighting savor more of the foreign school than they do of the American.

From every standpoint except that of the box-office, *Street Scene* is a remarkable achievement. It will warm the heart of



the enthusiast who looks for brilliance in the treatment of his screen entertainment, but it will fail to entertain the public that contributes the money to keep the film business running. If *Street Scene* had to be made, I can imagine no director who could do the job better than King Vidor has done it, but I

can not understand how anyone could have imagined that the play had box-office possibilities when transferred to the screen. In its picture form it is the product of the ignorance that has wrecked United Artists. Anyone with sufficient brains to keep him animated should know that a photograph of a thoughtful stage drama can not become popular entertainment for the world at large.

▼▼ As an example of applied screen technic I enjoyed every foot of *Street Scene*, and I left it with a higher regard than ever for the genius of King Vidor. Practically all the action takes place in front of a cheap apartment house, and the camera never leaves the block in which the house is situated, nor is there a single view of an interior in the whole picture. It will be realized, therefore, that Vidor had to work within narrower limits than ever before confined the action of a film production. Under the impression that he is achieving motion, he uses every means at his command to animate his scenes. Pedestrians, motors, taxicabs and trucks keep up a motion that is purely physical and which has but little relation to filmic motion, the all-important element of a motion picture.

The entire story of *Street Scene* is told in dialogue. There are but few moments during its screening when we do not have to listen intently to keep from missing something essential to our understanding of the story. There is a great deal of gossip that we have to listen to, some expositions of sociological theories, some sidewalk philosophy and some family disagreements—all of it presented admirably by a large cast of extraordinary and even merit, but which is as much out of place on the screen as anything could be. It is stuff that is conceived for stage presentation and which never should have been put on the screen in the hope of earning a profit. It has cost the industry many millions of dollars to discover that the public does not like to listen to its screen entertainment, but in spite of the discovery it continues to turn out the kind of pictures that has paralyzed the box-office.

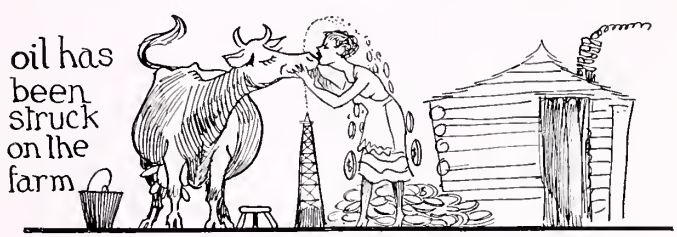
▼▼ One thing lacking in Vidor's presentation of his drab story is feeling. In *Transatlantic* the sweetness of Lois Moran's expression of love for her father brought a lump to my throat, but in *Street Scene* Sylvia Sidney's grief over the murder of her mother by her father, produced in me only a feeling of cold admiration for the skill with which she expressed her grief. My heart was left untouched by the major tragedy, although I accorded emotional response to the feeling that Anna Kostant, a stranger to me, displayed in her minor role as the sister who felt that her brother's career would be ruined by his love for Sylvia, purely a secondary consideration. A scene that stirs our emotions is more salable at the box-office than is one that we admire only for its technical excellence. *Street Scene* is impressive by virtue of the brilliance of its direction, but it lacks the box-office quality of emotional appeal although it essentially is intensely human.

Something to Vidor's credit is the excellence of the performances that he derives from all the members of his long cast. The story deals with the affairs of quite ordinary people which permit the introduction of some carefully drawn characterizations. One of the most striking is that of a gossip-monger, by Beulah Bondi. Anna Kostant gives an arresting performance. Max Montor, David Landau, T. H. Manning, Matthew McHugh, John M. Qualen and George Humbert have clever characterizations to their credit. Sylvia Sidney, William Collier, Jr. and Estelle Taylor are thoroughly satisfactory in leading roles. George Barnes has some excellent photography as his contribution.

No review of *Street Scene* would be complete if it did not contain a tribute to the excellence and appropriateness of the musical score arranged by Al Newman. Whatever degree of popularity the picture meets with will be due more to the musical interpretations of some of its scenes than to any other individual feature. It is heartening to see the gradual return of music to the screen.

Henry King Scores

As sweet as the breath of a wind that has blown across a field of clover, as tender as the smile of a mother who stands above a crib, as sentimental as the dream of a maiden in love, but withal as vigorous as a tumult in a human heart, is *Merely Mary Ann*, a Fox picture, directed by Henry King. It is a production that will bring prosperity to box-offices, and, I fervently hope, will teach producers that there still is a market for the decent things in life. The success that this picture will achieve, and the success that *Daddy Long Legs* has



achieved, surely will make even producers realize that they can make more money selling decency to the public in the form of motion pictures than they can by selling photographs of conversations dealing with the absurdity of marriage as a prelude to the living together of a girl and a boy.

I fairly revelled in *Merely Mary Ann*. Reviewers who are so proud of their reputations for being hard to please that they don't enjoy themselves even when they see pictures that please them, are going to tell you that Henry King's story is out of date, that it is too sentimental and asks us to take too much for granted. And the stupid public is going to barge right past these reviewers and fill theatres wherever the picture is shown. I know it savors of a score of years ago to have a scene in which the poor working girl suddenly discovers that oil has been struck on the barren farm her father left her, and that she has become rich instantly by exactly one million dollars. But what of it? Who am I to quarrel with a thing like that—I, who jumped up and yelled "Yes!" as Maude Adams stepped to the footlights when appearing in *Peter Pan* and asked the audience if it believed in fairies?

▼▼ That is what the gentle and poetic soul of Henry King has done to *Merely Mary Ann*. He causes Janet Gaynor to step directly into our hearts as soon as she appears on the screen, and thereafter we are prepared to believe in fairies, banshees, hobgoblins or any other thing that looks as if it

might affect *Mary Ann's* fate. King relies principally upon the camera in telling his story, his emotional values being brought out pictorially. Although made from a stage play, *Merely Mary Ann* in its essentials is a motion picture. When the screen went talkie Fox went stage more wholeheartedly than any other studio, with the result that its product became awful. Apparently it is regaining its senses. In quick succession it gives us three most worthy motion pictures, *Bad Girl*, *Transatlantic* and *Merely Mary Ann*, each the work of a director who has had long experience in making silent pictures.

Merely Mary Ann brings Janet Gaynor and Charlie Farrell together again in a romance that is clean and decent. That means box-office. They never should have appeared in any other kind of story. They are in this picture, a sweet girl and a nice boy sincerely in love with each other. They do not act; there is nothing mechanical about them. They give from within and are fortunate in never having suffered the blight of stage training which has ruined so many people who, without it, might have become successful screen actors. Beryl Mercer gets away from tearful parts and assumes the kind of role that made her famous on the London stage. In *Merely Mary Ann* she has a definite characterization that she handles with the rare art that is hers. Arnold Lucy is another who gives an outstanding performance, even though his part is brief.

▼▼ JULES FURTHMAN made the screen play from the Israel Zangwill story and the stage play that was based on it. Furthman recently has been the creator of several scripts from which highly meritorious motion pictures have been made. John Seitz did the camera work and William Darling provided the settings. The combined result of the work of these two artists comes to us in the form of some beautifully composed and photographed scenes. Throughout the production King makes his camera work highly effective. In the boarding house in which *Mary Ann* goes to work, we have many striking shots. So well does King handle his elements that we do not realize that practically the whole story is told in two sets, the boarding house and a cottage by the sea.

One of the interesting features of King's direction is the fluency he maintains in planting his story at the outset. We have to know the background of both Janet and Charlie and what happened to them before the picture opens. King manages to do all this without sacrificing the suggestion of the forward movement of the story. I have elaborated upon this point in another page of this *Spectator*.

See *Merely Mary Ann*. Have your faith in the screen revived. Take your mother and your daughter. They will like it, and they won't blush.

Interesting

LOVE VERSUS career is the theme of the story made into a picture by Howard Hughes. It is Billie Dove's first starring vehicle to be released by United Artists, and is called *The Age for Love*. Frank Lloyd directed. It is not a good picture even though it is somewhat of a personal triumph for Billie Dove and is decidedly to the credit of Frank Lloyd. The story is too much in monotone and is without either emotional or dramatic highspots. It ambles along amiably, however, until it ends agreeably and pleasantly—and then for some reason that would bewilder any motion picture intelligence, it keeps right on going for another thousand feet or so. At the place where it ended naturally and logically the heroine and hero are heading in different directions, which would be all right with any audience, for if up to that time the story has accomplished anything, it has established that both of them would be happier apart.

But the producer apparently thinks that any ending is "unhappy" that does not show the girl and the boy in one another's arms; accordingly he distorts the story horribly and kills its last chance of pleasing an intelligent audience, merely to bring together two people whom no audience would want brought together. That is the main weakness of the picture. Casting Charles Starrett opposite such a glorious creature as Billie was a mistake. He is awkward and colorless, and I don't think any audience will care a hang whether he wins or loses the girl. In tender scenes when Billie protested her love

for the youth, I knew she didn't mean it and was doing it only because her director told her to. And it could have been a good story if just a little more picture sense had been applied to it. In every other department *Age for Love* is thoroughly satisfactory.

▼▼ ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, my brilliant associate, never was any more brilliant than he was in his contribution of dialogue to this picture. He made the characters talk sense and wrote lines that advanced the story; but his greatest achievement was the restraint he showed. Apparently he did not contract with Howard Hughes to deliver dialogue at so much per bushel, the result being that no matter what other ills afflict it, no one can accuse *Age for Love* of talking itself to death. If we must have dialogue writers, let's have only the Bob Sherwoods, who write as little as possible and make that little a definite part of the entertainment value of the picture.

Frank Lloyd made a good job of the direction. Hampered by the lack of a good story and a synchronized score to take the flatness out of the purely motion picture scenes that were shot in silence, he nevertheless gives us a picture that is worth seeing.

▽▽ BILLIE DOVE definitely establishes in this picture her right to be accepted as a motion picture actress with ability enough to justify her stardom. In her silent days her beauty was enough to satisfy any audience, although it never was enough to satisfy her. Still as beautiful as ever—even more so, if that be possible—the sound camera reveals that she possesses an agreeably musical voice which supplements to an entirely satisfactory extent the acting ability she developed in silent pictures. I don't think Billie ever was given credit for being as good an actress as she is. I always had the idea that

she could do some mighty fine work if she ever were allowed to let herself go, and her performance some years ago in a picture directed by Lois Weber made the suspicion a certainty. In *Age for Love* she has a restrained part which she enacts admirably, and while the picture will do Howard Hughes' pocketbook no particular good, it certainly will do Billie a lot of good.

Edward Everett Horton—I think I might go so far as to say, What-a-Man Horton—plays a sleepy authors' agent, and gives another performance that can be summed up best by the word delicious, a word I feel like using every time I write of one of his screen appearances. In this picture he is Billie Dove's business associate, and I'd like to bet something with someone that every audience that sees it will wish that it had ended with Billie and Eddie in each other's arms. Such an ending would have made the story more sensible and also would have given it a chance to fade out on a brilliant note.

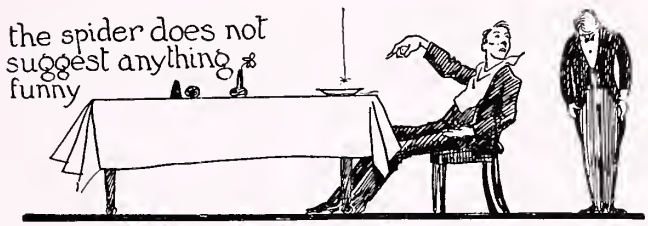
A splendid bit of casting was that of Adrian Morris as a dominating, thoughtless husband. He gives a really admirable performance. I can't recall having seen him before, but this one performance satisfies me that he is a character actor who should be kept busy. The role of his wife is played by Betty Ross Clarke, who gives a finished and intelligent performance. Mary Duncan distinguishes herself in a part of limited footage, but of considerable story value.

Comedy Relief

NOT FOR A LONG time have I seen a picture that tries at the same time to be very, very good and very, very poor, quite as hard as *The Spider* does. It is a Fox picture, directed by William Cameron Menzies and Kenneth MacKenna and featuring Edmund Lowe and Lois Moran. Whenever, by good direction, competent performances and effective and striking photography, the story becomes engrossing, El Brendel, whom Fox retains to spoil pictures, takes the center of the screen and contributes some irrelevant comedy that brings things to a standstill. It is a pitiful example of what pictures must not do if they expect to be successful. Brendel is not the only offender here. Every time the action approaches a dramatic point there is a cut to any one of half a dozen people who seem to be in the film for the sole purpose of keeping it from being good.

And here the producers will interrupt with the remark, uttered in a quite superior tone, that if I had been present at the preview and had heard the audience laugh at the comedy interruptions, I would not criticise them quite so harshly. I am quite ready to concede that the interpolated comedy provoked laughter. That is why it should not have been in the picture. *The Spider* is a story that does not suggest anything funny. It has all the elements necessary to make it a gripping and exciting mystery drama, but under the treatment given it it becomes merely a very poor motion picture. The box-office success being scored by *Dracula*, a ghastly picture without a laugh in it, offsets any argument that can be advanced that a story's tenseness should be relieved by the introduction of something alien to it.

▼▼ I WAS SURPRISED to find the comedy relief so rampant in this picture. Most of the studios have recovered from the insanity that was manifested by a habit of putting in laughs where they do not belong, but here we have a picture that is more crazy along that line than any other that I have seen. If *The Spider* had the kind of story that had to be rendered less harrowing by the dragging in of something whose only claim to being comedy was the studio's claim that it is, then



manifestly it is a story that never should have been made into a picture. If, on the other hand, it is suitable for screen translation, then it should be presented with all the vigor and strength it possesses, and without distractions of any sort. Junior Laemmle had the same problem in *Dracula*. He decided to be true to the story and he turned out a big box-office success. Fox was afraid to make a complete job of *Spider* and has turned out what can not escape being a failure.

And still *Spider* is an interesting picture. Its two young directors are responsible for some extraordinary camera effects which were handled with great skill by James Wong Howe, chief cameraman. The comedy interruptions, which compose

such a large part of the production, were directed satisfactorily, and whenever the story is permitted to become interesting its dramatic high points are brought out in a highly efficient manner. The only place in which the direction falls down is in the characterization of the police officers who undertake the solution of the murder mystery. They bellow at the public like a lot of semi-demented bulls. Purnell Pratt's is quite the most impossible characterization that I have seen on the screen this year.

Edmund Lowe gives an excellent performance in a sympathetic role that makes great demands on him. Lois Moran, perhaps the most talented of all the younger misses on the screen, makes herself impressive in a not very prominent role. Howard Phillips, a newcomer from the stage, gives an outstanding performance. Unless I miss my guess he is a young man from whom we will hear. George E. Stone, the sewer rat of *Seventh Heaven*, the *Sol Levy* of *Cimarron*, both great performances, has a small but important role in *Spider*. It seems strange to me that some producer does not develop the box-office possibilities of Stone. The screen is lacking in young character men. Possessing great skill as an actor, a spiritual quality as gentle as that of Janet Gaynor, and the intelligence to grasp the full understanding of any part, Stone could be made as great a box-office asset as the late Lon Chaney became.

Aimee and Barbara

THE PERFORMANCE of Barbara Stanwyck in *The Miracle Woman* proved a disappointment to me. The first time I saw her on the screen she captured my fancy instantly and when I hunted up the Columbia picture I anticipated a real treat, but it failed to materialize. Peculiarly enough, however, after I had viewed the picture I thought no less of the rebellious Barbara as an actress. The final fade-out is on a close-up of her, and if she had contributed nothing else to the production, it is enough in itself to mark her as a girl of remarkable ability. In her light and romantic scenes with David Manners she is delightfully at her ease and completely satisfactory, but as the evangelist she fails to reveal the quality that has made Aimee so successful with her racket. She has none of the fire, none of the fervor that Aimee puts into her fake sincerity.

I never have seen Aimee at work, but I have listened to her a few times on the radio and she has been hurled at me in so many headlines that I feel I am acquainted with her. She rather intrigued me up to the time of the Carmel affair; then I lost my respect for her, not because she indulged in a perfectly human yearning, but because she asked me, as one of the public, to believe her version of it. That was too much. But I admit that she has something, that she possesses a power over minds weak enough to be swayed by it, and whatever it is, is what Barbara failed to inject into her characterization of What-a-man's temporary step-daughter. However, if Aimee puts on a show half as good as Harry Cohn represents it to be in *Miracle Woman*, I think I will toddle down to her tabernacle sometime and have a go at it.

Columbia gave the picture an impressive production, but Frank Capra's direction, like Barbara's performance, is not quite up to the standard that we have reason to expect. There are a lot of little things about it that I did not like—too many things that reminded me that I was looking at a motion picture. Sam Hardy's performance, however, was not one of them. He gives a fine characterization of the unscrupulous manager of the evangelist. And I liked David Manners' work, although at times his movements were more assured than a blind man's should be. But *Miracle Woman* is an interesting picture.

Melodrama Afloat

SELDOM DO WE have a picture in which the director figures so largely as William K. Howard figures in the filming of *Transatlantic*, a Fox picture made from an original story written by Guy Bolton. It is a director's triumph as there is nothing in the story to set it apart from other ordinary melodramas. In fact, if you consider only the story, you will find it a rather unbelievable yarn. Shooting up a transatlantic liner with its somewhat limited opportunities for escape, simply isn't done. Nor can we quite believe that a master crook would take

his whole gang aboard with him when he intended to rob but one man. Nor does it seem plausible that the president of a big New York bank would ship his mistress to Europe on the same boat that carried him and his wife.

Yet Bill Howard takes these things and makes us both believe and like them. He picks us up at the dock, takes us aboard the liner, introduces us to his characters, and we must believe the unbelievable things because we see them done. In any event, we have no time to formulate a belief in their implausibility for they follow one another too briskly to permit of analysis. The music that is introduced with such telling effect throughout the production plays a definite part in heightening the illusion of reality. Its contribution to the picture is tremendous and would be still greater had it been continuous. It will not be long now until every picture made in Hollywood has a complete synchronized score.

▼▼ HOWARD CAPTURES the instant attention of his audience by the graphic manner in which he shows the departure of the liner from its dock in New York. I have had half a dozen Atlantic sailings and as I viewed the opening of Bill's picture I felt that I was sailing again. Everything that Howard introduces in this sequence is authentic, and it is done so well that it must carry conviction even to those who never have seen an ocean liner. The sequence is pure motion picture, the camera telling it all. Quite as adroit is Howard's method of introducing his characters. They fairly ooze into the story, and as we follow them through their experiences on the voyage, we encounter nothing that for an instant disturbs our illusion that we are aboard ship.

It was too much to expect that Howard would have been permitted to make the perfect motion picture with dialogue. He has the ability to do it, and some day he will be allowed to, but meanwhile we will have to accept *Transatlantic* as a near approach to the formula that ultimately will govern the making of film entertainment. The perfect picture will have more music and less dialogue than we find in *Transatlantic*.

▼▼ HOWARD CAST his picture admirably. I don't think I ever saw a production that had a more evenly balanced cast. In no branch of his direction did Howard display more genius than he did in the handling of his characters and in deriving from them the kind of performances that blended into one another so perfectly. As soon as one scene began to fade out I anticipated with confidence the one to follow as I knew I was due for another acting treat. I can't remember ever before having this feeling while I was viewing a picture. And never before did I enjoy Edmund Lowe's work as I enjoyed it here. He gives a smooth, easy and thoroughly likable performance. John Halliday, Earle Foxe and Billy Bevan also contribute excellent performances.

I want to give Jean Hersholt a separate paragraph. He plays the father of Lois Moran—a kindly old lens grinder who has worked hard all his life. In all the notices of *Transatlantic* that I have read I did not find any mention of him, an oversight that is due solely to the perfection of his characterization. He is a self-effacing old fellow whom few passengers on the ship would notice and whom none of the reviewers did notice. Screen actors become favorites by the

cumulative effect of their repeated appearances on the screen. This is denied Hersholt. No one ever has seen him on the screen. There was a kindly old Jew in *Abie's Irish Rose*, a cheap, drunken sport in *Stella Dallas*, a delightfully unconventional tutor in *Student Prince*, a cruel, unscrupulous father in *Hell Harbor*, and various striking characters in numerous other pictures, but none of them was Jean Hersholt. There was nothing about his performance in one picture to remind us that he was the man we saw in another. By his very mastery of his art he has denied himself the cumulative value of his many appearances, with the result that he is not recognized generally for the fine artist that he is. A succession of good parts and proper exploitation would make him a tremendous box-office asset.

▼▼ THERE ARE THREE girls in *Transatlantic* who would make notable the cast of any picture, and who give to this one three perfect performances. They are Lois Moran, Myrna Loy and Greta Nissen. I agree with the opinion which Bob Sherwood recently expressed in the *Spectator*, that there is no girl in pictures with talents more marked and more varied than those possessed by Lois Moran. She has everything. In *Transatlantic* her part is rather conventional, but she handles it admirably. Myrna Loy contributes an evenly balanced and clever performance, not quite as vibrant a part as usually falls to her lot, but her unusual personality registers strongly. I don't know any screen actress with a greater command of her art than Greta Nissen possesses. She was allowed to get away from Hollywood just as she was coming into her own, and Fox showed great wisdom in bringing her back, and equal wisdom in giving her an opportunity in *Transatlantic* to display her grace as a dancer, even though it was an interpolation that was dragged in by the heels.

Transatlantic is another picture that will go a long way towards restoring the standing of Fox as a producing organization. Winnie Sheehan seems again to be striking his stride as a producer. *Bad Girl*, *Merely Mary Ann* and *Transatlantic* are a great three of a kind to draw to. Here's hoping that he fills.

I Go Into Business

THE BIG WRITER sat on my front porch, filled his pipe with my tobacco, breathed the salt air from my ocean, and called me a damned fool.

"Four years ago," he began his argument in support, "you dropped into my office at the studio when I was stumped by a story problem. You worked it out with me and supplied the big scene that was the outstanding feature of the picture. The story was to be for a program picture, but it landed in the Carthay Circle for a successful run. It was my first big success. Since then I have been in the first flight and am credited with a succession of hits. You contributed something to every one of them. Every time I was stuck I cried for you, and you never failed me. I have grown rich from our joint efforts and you have never accepted a cent.

"Why don't you get wise? How about these big literary shots who are brought here from the East and have no way of learning what it is all about? They know Hollywood is

a gold mine, but they can't get their picks in. They'd jump at the chance to have you as a story consultant. And how about contract writers who want to hold their jobs? Who else has a grasp like yours of the fundamentals of story construction? Perhaps a few people on studio pay-rolls, but no one unattached. After an author has worked with you on three or four stories he will know more about screen essentials than he could learn in any other way. You could equip him or her for a prosperous career. Get wise, you damned fool, and make a bank-roll for yourself."

Very well. I'm a story consultant. Who wants to hire me? I don't see why the idea is not a good one. It's work I like, and there are a score or more of writers who tell me that I have helped them tremendously. The thought of making a business of it never had entered my head. However, if it is to be a business, a business it will be. Here are my Rules and Regulations:

My relations with a writer are to remain confidential. I will not work for a contingent fee nor for a set per centage of what a story brings when it is sold. My fee will be arranged before each job starts; half of it to be paid when I start, and the other half when I finish. In cases of clients who are free-lances, when stories I work on are completed to my satisfaction I will draw them to the attention of producers, and almost can promise to place them, as I am acquainted with story requirements. For this service I will charge nothing.

During civilized working hours my secretary can be reached at GL 5506. And then there is the postman.

Metro Pictures

AN EXHIBITOR, complaining about the high-hat attitude of the M-G-M sales department, asks me if the Metro product this year will be good enough to warrant his paying the exorbitant prices asked and accepting all the conditions imposed. I don't see what Metro has to be snooty about. Pete Harrison, who knows his business, took the trouble to find out just what pictures from the Culver City plant have done well at the box-office. Figures from all over the country show that last year Metro turned out seventeen flops; seventeen of its pictures did fairly well; nine did good business, and only two came under the heading of "excellent." Metro should drop its bludgeon and carry its hat in its hand when it approaches exhibitors.

What exhibitors should take into account is that in the list of last year's flops there are pictures just as good as Metro ever can expect to turn out. They were flops because their stories were told in dialogue, instead of by the camera, and this year many more of the same kind are being made. Metro, and all the other big producing organizations, have gone out of the motion picture business and are making only talkies. And, the public doesn't want talkies. If exhibitors must show talkies or close their houses, there is no reason why they should be held up by Metro. If the terms are too stiff, they can buy the flops of other producers.

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▼▼ PERHAPS I shouldn't quote her, as the letter was a personal one, but I can not resist letting you in on this much of what Elinor Glyn wrote me: "Why don't the producers listen

to your sensible advice? Why don't the writers learn? It is a frightful muddle now. I almost think jealousy of the 'second' men, not the very top, has something to do with the situation. They would prevent the writers having a chance even if the writers did know motion pictures."

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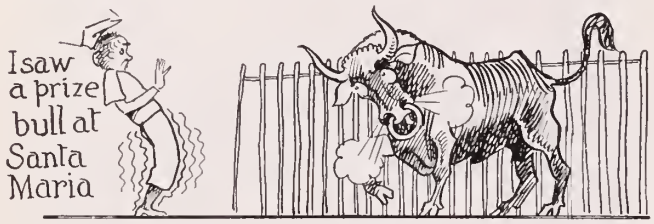
▼▼ ON THE ALAN HANCOCK ranch at Santa Maria I saw a prize bull. He was in a little place of his own, surrounded by what I thought was a rather frail fence. "He must be quiet and gentle," I remarked to the ranch manager who was showing me around. "On the contrary," was the answer,



"he's exceedingly dangerous." "It seems to me," I said, "that it would be a simple matter for him to push this fence over and get at us if he wanted to." "It would be," agreed the ranch manager, "but he doesn't know that he could push the fence over." That's a great text for a powerful article about something or other.

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▼▼ PARAMOUNT'S PRODUCTION methods have one advantage over those employed by any of the other studios: The quality of the season's output can be foretold definitely. Exhibitors hereafter need take no chances when considering Paramount product, at least, not until the production system is changed. On the other lots, which select their stories themselves, it is possible that quite a percentage of successes may be turned out. On the Paramount lot, which must make its pictures only from stories selected by the sales department in New York, there is not the slightest prospect of box-office successes being produced. Occasionally there may be one, of course, but the whole season's output can not escape being very bad. It would be interesting if some Paramount shareholder went into court and asked for an order restraining the officials of the company from running the business as they are running it. I believe he could establish that his interests were being jeopardized by the incompetency of those who control the company. This one fact—that a New York committee selects the material for Hollywood directors to make into pictures—would prove his case.

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▼▼ A NEW WEEKLY for exhibitors, *How*, which calls itself "The National Weekly of Analytical Showmanship," has made its appearance with Eddy Eckels as editor, Gus McCarthy, managing editor, and the How Publishing Company as publisher. I don't know Eddy and Gus, but I suspect that they are Rotarians, for people who sign themselves that way generally have so much chumminess in their system that they must go some place at least once a week and scatter it among their friends. However all that may be, and despite the names, I think Eddy and Gus have something. It is a terrible job to read *How*, as it has the most awful make-up with which a publication ever was cursed, but after struggling through it my goggle-eyed opinion is that it will be of value to exhibitors if it will introduce sanity into its typographical arrangement and stick to the high principles it confesses in its first number. In its present form it screams at you, but it screams about something worth while. The address is 10456 Ilona Avenue, West Los Angeles.

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▼▼ YOU SHORTLY will be given an opportunity of seeing a series of short subjects that will interest you—*Football for the Fan*, conceived by Norman Sper and produced by A. L. Mannon. I am a football fan only in an academic sense. I always want to know the result of a big game, but I wouldn't push my way through a big crowd to get to one. Apparently Sper made his little pictures for me and people like me. I have seen several of them and from each of them I learned more about football than I had picked up in any other way. And I was interested, more so than I ever can remember being in a short picture. It was not merely the football that interested. My attention was held by the cleverness of the whole thing, the intelligence displayed in the selection of the material and the manner of its presentation. Here we have good showmanship. Exhibitors will make no mistake in booking the series.

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▼▼ IT WOULD TAKE a better man than I am to review *Monkey Business*, the Marx Brothers' opus which Norman McLeod directed for Paramount. It is composed of equal parts of absolute rot, silliness, insanity and nonsense, and is one of the funniest things I ever saw. The enjoyment you derive from it will depend upon your state of mind. Put yourself in the right condition mentally and you will have the time of your life. McLeod keeps the thing moving at a terrific rate. I would guess that there will not be a moment while the picture is running that there will not be laughter coming from the audience. I don't know one Marx from another, but all of them are funny. Don't miss *Monkey Business*. If you don't like it, you can take the blame upon yourself.

▼ ▼

▼▼ OTTO BROWER made such a good job of his direction of *The Hard Hombre*, a Hoot Gibson western, that he reduced its entertainment value. But he proved a point that I have been urging—that introducing long silent scenes into talkies will make them worse unless continuous synchronized scores are provided. With an appropriate musical accompaniment *Hard Hombre* would be screen entertainment that any audience would enjoy; without it, the picture is an example of highly

intelligent directing that loses some of its force by virtue of the long stretches of absolute silence, which is something for which Brower can not be blamed. I have been watching this young man's work. By some unkind trick of fate he has been

given nothing but westerns to do, but in each of them he has revealed a quality that hints at great possibilities when he gets something to his liking. Of all the young fellows who are struggling for a place in the front line of directors I would select Otto Brower as the one most likely to get a high place and keep it.

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▼▼ SOMEWHERE I READ that Metro is going to reissue *The Big Parade* with a really fine synchronized score. I am willing to bet my favorite golf club against a bottle of near beer that it will be a box-office success. There are a score or more successes of the silent days that could be made successes to-day if they were accorded suitable musical treatment and had sound effects applied with discretion. It would be easy to determine which pictures should be selected. Each of those which were awarded *Photoplay's* gold medal for the best picture of the year, naturally would be on the list. Other selections could be made from *Film Daily's* ten best pictures of each year. These reissues, however, will not be successful unless both producers and exhibitors go at them in a big way. They should be prepared on a scale that will put them into first-run houses.

▼ ▼

▼▼ THE SUCCESS that *Daddy Long Legs* and *Merely Mary Ann* are having is comforting. It probably will mean that we will have more decency on the screen. Producers can chase the sex, gangster and all other phases, until they have yielded their last dollar, but they should not lose sight of the fact that there is another phase that never runs out, one quality inherent in the human race that always will yield a profit when it is catered to—the quality of decent thinking. We want on the screen to-day the emotions that made our grandfathers cry, for emotionally we never change. All we want are the old emotions dressed in modern clothes.

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▼▼ WRITES JACK ALICOATE in his *Film Daily:* "We happened to be talking to a small-town exhibitor some few nights ago. He had a vague idea that we were in pictures, which idea grew considerably more vague as the evening grew on." I know how the exhibitor felt. I got the same feeling when Jack talked pictures with me one night.

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▼▼ IF UNITED ARTISTS' pictures were as good as the pictures of Joe Schenck and Sam Goldwyn that always are included in the company's advertising, United Artists would be a great deal better off.

▼ ▼ ▼

THROWING SAND IN HOLLYWOOD'S FACE

By ARABELLA MACINNES

MANY people in the world at large who are not interested vitally in motion pictures, are so inclined to sum up the industry in terms of money, that if I add my own feeble protest that there are other considerations, they immediately cite the exorbitant salaries paid screen actors, or how someone now enjoying the privileges and salary of a star could not at one time pay his ice-bill; or how Hollywood contributes to the immediate decline of a nation by indulging in morals which are not uplifting, or how the people now actively engaged in producing pictures lack culture.

Just what all this has to do with their enjoyment of a good picture, I never have been able to determine. They rarely mention these details at such a time; they simply talk about the picture. It seems logical to judge that if there were more good pictures released, there would be more good talk, and Hollywood could assume its rightful place in the Hollywood hills,—a film center of interest.

New York and Broadway long have been names synonymous with the stage, and I can see no reason why the development of screen art should not take place in Hollywood rather than in the home of the stage. There should be at least the breadth of a continent between the stage and the screen, because they are two separate arts. The screen can learn much from the stage just as a sculptor can broaden his chosen art by the study of painting on canvas, or a writer can learn much from the study of music, but no art needs to be blind to its own possibilities by letting another art impose itself upon it.

▼▼ THERE IS nothing effeminate about the *Spectator,* but I am just effeminate enough to have a baby who will be two years old this summer. Suzanne and the Prince of Wales celebrate their birthdays on the same day, though there is a difference in their age and experience. The Prince of Wales would probably not amuse himself by throwing sand in my eyes as Suzanne did the other day at the beach,—at least I can not imagine his being interested enough in sand or in me to do that,—but Suzanne thought it a highly exciting opportunity to get results. The results were that I refused to accept the sand. I thought my face was entirely satisfactory without it. In fact, when my face was created, it was not fashioned for that purpose.

In case you are wondering what all this has to do with motion pictures, let me say that the film colony of Hollywood has a great deal thrown in its face from time to time, regarding its position as a film center, and for no particular reason. It should refuse to accept these false accusations, just as the screen should refuse to accept the insidious pleadings of those who would impose upon it the limitations of the stage,—all due regard for the stage as an art in itself. The stage has several hundred years of tradition back of it. The screen is just beginning to realize its own nature.

▼▼ THE LATE David Belasco was a master of the stage. He was born (speaking of birthdays again) on a day which I have been celebrating for a number of years because someone made out a birth certificate for me to that effect. I cite this because I am only human and like to be associated with a great man, even in so remote and chaste a manner as having the same day of the month for a birthday. As well as being a master of stage craft, familiar with the theatre and all of its demands, he was a genius of stage art and he possessed an unlimited capacity for detail. Nothing was too insignificant for his personal attention. He brought remarkable powers to the stage and created its life from its own character.

The screen can learn much from David Belasco. In the memorial services held recently for him in San Francisco, his native city, perhaps the most outstanding tributes paid to him were the expressions of regard for his kindness, his far-reaching friendship.

Belasco, a western boy, studied the theatre and contributed more than any one man ever has to the growth of the art of the stage. I feel confident that there is someone, by nature endowed with those elements of genius and kindness and friendship, someone with keen perception and broad vision and a clear understanding of human nature, who will bring to Hollywood and the screen what David Belasco brought to New York and the stage.

True Confessions From The East Coast

By R. E. Sherwood

Here is your correspondent, back in New York, and trying desperately hard to regain the identity which evaporated when it was first exposed to the California sun.

There are those who may arise to enquire: Why try to regain that old identity? What good was it when you had it? These are hard questions to answer. But whatever the reason, you have to have an identity in New York. You can't live without it. Whereas, in Hollywood, all you have to have is influence.

Since returning to the home town, I have seen no plays and only one picture—*Waterloo Bridge*. It is an excellent picture, an admirable one, and the sight of it provoked in me emotions of a curious sort. I was exhilarated by it, and also depressed.

For *Waterloo Bridge* was adapted from a play that I wrote. As a play, it ran for a grand total of sixteen weeks in Boston, New Haven, Hartford, Philadelphia, New York and Prague (Czecho-Slovakia.) As a picture, it appears to be a great success. Within a week after its release, it will have played in more than a hundred cities throughout the U. S.

In consequence of which, I am receiving congratulations on having "authored" (what a word!) a big hit.

▼▼ Why am I being congratulated?

Granted that *Waterloo Bridge* will be a triumph on the screen, and will make a lot of money for Carl Laemmle & Son—what concern is that of mine?

I didn't write this motion picture, nor did I direct it, nor did I enact the leading role of a beautiful street-walker in London. The writing, for the most part, was done by Benn Levy and Tom Reed, the directing by James Whale, and the acting (and fine acting it is) by Mae Clarke.

Here and there in the dialogue are lines which, when I heard them, seemed to have a reminiscent ring, but the first scenes of the picture, the last scenes of the picture, and all the middle scenes involving Frederick Kerr, Enid Bennett, and Bette Davis were not in the play that I wrote.

Those remarks are not offered in a spirit of complaint. They are uttered in a spirit of gratitude to James Whale who made a better job of *Waterloo Bridge* than I did.

▼▼ Whenever a playwright or a novelist sells one of his works to the movies, and that work happens to be converted by some process of Hollywoodian alchemy into a box-office smash, the value of the screen rights to all his other works are instantly enormously increased. It seems to make no difference whether or not he deserved any credit for the film's merit. He becomes a "name", and therefore high-priced.

This happened in the case of Philip Barry, who had written upwards of ten plays, only one of which, *Paris Bound*, was made into a picture. It created no sensation. Then came the celluloid version of *Holiday*—and Philip Barry, to his infinite surprise, found himself cast in the role of Hollywood's blue-eyed boy. His next play, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, was bought for a sum more than twice as large as any he had ever received before, though it was considerably less adaptable to the screen than had been most of his previous efforts.

Without wishing to seem unduly commercial, I hope that the success of *Waterloo Bridge* will produce similarly gratifying results.

New York Revisited

▼▼ It won't be very interesting to all of you out on the West Coast to know how New York looks to me now that I've come home; but, regardless of your indifference, I beg to announce that it looks terrible, and also stimulating.

Despite my original determination to sneer at California, I find myself yearning for Sunset Boulevard, that marvelous avenue of escape from reality.

There is no such escape in New York. Reality jumps up from every subway station, and down from the 100th floor of the Empire State Building, and smacks you in the face.

In New York, you have to work for a living. In Hollywood, all you have to do is say "Yes."

Progress in New York is up-hill, struggling and sweating. In Hollywood, you have the lovely sensation of coasting easily on the down-grade, with the knowledge that at the end of the coast is nothing worse than blissful oblivion.

In New York, you have to live on humble-pie, garnished with raspberries. In Hollywood, you dine on the succulent fruits of the lotus.

▼▼ For some reason, a writer in Hollywood is regarded as an impressive personage. He may be known to be personally a so-and-so, and probably is, but there is supposed to be some mystery about the nature of his occupation which fills the film executives with awe. The act of expressing thoughts in words is fraught with fascinating mystery in the minds of those who find it frightfully difficult to compose the following letter:

"Dear Sir:

Yours of the 30th inst. received and contents noted. In reply, would wish to state that I am not interested.

With kindest remembrances to your wife,

Yours most sincerely,

Etc."

▼▼ For the writer, Hollywood is the Land of Dreams Come True. It is the garden where Easy Fame and Easy Money grow. Whereas, New York is the Port of Hissing Men.

In New York, writers are recognized for what they usually are: palpable frauds. If you sneak into the city as a total stranger, you may get away with one success; but once you've identified yourself as a possible favorite, the critical gangsters start selecting a spot on which to put you.

There are no long-term contracts in New York. Every

writer—indeed, every worker of almost every conceivable kind—is on a day-to-day basis.

▼▼ When you have written a play, and it goes into rehearsal for Broadway production, the event assumes overwhelming importance. Its success or failure becomes a matter of life and death. You feel, "This may be the last play I'll ever write. I may never have another idea. To-morrow, I may be bumped off by a taxi-cab or a stray bullet. Therefore, this one absolutely *has* to be good!" In consequence of which, you give your all.

When you write a picture story, for Hollywood production, you feel, comfortably: "Why waste my energy on this palooka? After all, it's going to turn out to be just another movie. If the boobs in Kokomo eat it up, I'll get more dough for the next job. But if it flops, I'll be able to pass the buck to the director."

Which explains, perhaps, just why it is that the film producers have to come East so frequently in search of new material.

▼▼ Writing for the stage, or for publication, is something of an adventure. It involves risks, hardships and the unquenchable thrill of experimentation.

Writing for the screen, alas, is a matter of routine. It is not creation: it is reproduction. It is not composition: it is the recording of melodies that someone else has composed.

When the movie magnates become hospitable to new ideas—when the spirit of courage and enterprise and chance-taking is allowed to flourish—things may be different....

But there I go again, following Mr. Beaton into the forbidden vistas of Utopia.

Only a Suggestion

▼▼ It surprises me that no one has as yet made a picture of Booth Tarkington's novel, *Mirthful Haven*. For all I know, the film rights to this book may already be in the possession of one of the producing companies; it may even be ready for release.

If not, I hope someone will do *Mirthful Haven*. It is a fine American story with plenty of situations (some of them thrilling) that are ideally suited to the screen, and with a star part made to order for almost any one of the cinema's more emotional young ladies.

Television Again

▼▼ Mr. Beaton does not agree with me that television, when perfected, will be serious and even disastrous for the film theatres. He points out, and with reason, that the seeing of motion pictures in the homes will be interrupted so frequently—by telephone calls, the arrival of collectors, the baby squalling, the roof falling in, etc.—that the average families will be driven out to the Fox-Tivoli, or the Warners-Regal, or the RKO-Imperial Palace so that they may look and listen in peace.

There is validity to this objection to television—and in a great many other objections that might be mentioned. But if Mr. Beaton thinks that a motion picture theatre is the ideal place in which to see motion pictures, then he must do practically all of his reviewing in projection rooms.

Even in one's own home one will suffer from no more distractions than those which habitually assail one in public film parlors, if as many.

There are the people who are continually either arriving or leaving, shutting off one's view of the screen and trampling on one's feet.

▼▼ There are the ladies who are always opening packages of caramels encased in cellophane, or its equivalent.

There are those somewhat hard of hearing who have to have every line of the dialogue repeated to them.

There are the hordes of amateur critics who make audible comments on everything that happens.

There are those who have just found seats for friends from whom they have been separated in the rush, and who shout "Yoo-hoo" across the heads of the audience.

Above all, there is "the surrounding program." When you go to a theatre for the purpose of seeing a certain picture, this surrounding program must be endured. On the radio, it can be shut off with but slight effort.

I repeat—television is going to add millions of recruits to the great back-to-the-home movement which prohibition started. And when people can't stand their homes any longer and must dash out the front door in desperation, they won't go to the theatres to see precisely the same kind of talkative shadows that have been performing for them night after night within their own four walls.

Embarrassing Question

▼▼ Whenever I encounter an old friend on the sidewalks of New York, and he fails to comment on my long absence (not having noticed it) I volunteer the information that I've been in Hollywood.

"Oh, *have* you!" he exclaims, and then hastens to enquire, "What's Greta Garbo like?"

From now on, to avoid expressions of scorn that invariably follow the admission, "I don't know," I'm going to pretend that I did meet her, that she and I are just like that.

It will make my friends happier to hear even unauthentic descriptions of the matchless Swede, and it will spare me from a lot of embarrassment.

Potpourri of This and That

By Dalton Trumbo

Hollywood has embraced the stage without considering its disadvantages. For all its flesh and blood reality the stage is unnatural. No group of people in the world talk as swiftly and as furiously as the players in a two hour legitimate production. One goes to the theatre granting them the necessity of their handicap—granting that there will be more talk than natural people would use. Because of the limitations of the stage constant dialogue is a necessity. Thirty-two rows back an auditor can not observe accurately the emotion that is expressed on the face of the leading lady. The players are situated on a single focal point—the stage—and they must express their feelings to an audience that is spread out before them like a fan even unto the heights of the second balcony. Is it then any wonder that they must rely more upon spoken words than upon the expression accompanying them? Which is not to say that the facial expression and physical action of a player on the stage is unimportant. Quite the contrary. But given a choice between expression of form and recital of lines, the legitimates must always fall back upon the lines.

▼▼ The screen is not so limited. The farthermost spectator can be transported within three feet of the leading lady's nose. He can study her countenance and discover her emotions at first hand. He does not have to peer at her through opera glasses. She is intimately beside him and the constant stream of words which are lifeblood to the play become superfluous to the motion picture. The strength of pictures lies in the universal appeal of pantomime—for want of a better word—and by catering to this appeal the player enters wider fields of emotional interpretation, the director has more opportunities to demonstrate skill, and the producer has a chance of paying off the interest on outstanding bonds.

Beyond question I am guilty of colossal presumption in writing thus of a dramatic form the technical side of which is totally foreign to my experience. But in the mild and apologetic effusions which from time to time appear on these pages under my name I am discounting myself as greatly as possible, and transforming myself into Audience. As Audience I am not interested even remotely in the technical difficulties which must be overcome before I am pleased. I am asking only to be amused. I am paying the bills and regardless of cost, equipment or tradition, I must get my money's worth. There are many capable men in Hollywood drawing quite good salaries from my pocketbook, and the problem of accomplishment is entirely up to them. All that I, as Audience, do is pay the fiddler, and if that gentleman strikes too many sour notes, I may soon cease paying, in which event there will be some hungry boys and girls wandering about the streets of Hollywood, thinking very hard as they wander.

Football Days

▼▼ The grand rush will soon be here, and in conformity with its new policy, *Hollywood Spectator* has managed to secure at the cost of tremendous effort, the complete schedule of the University of Southern California for the coming season. This sort of thing is not to be taken lightly, and the schedule holds more than passing interest to me, as one who has for some years now consistently bet on Troy against Notre Dame. What sad and melancholy years they have been—and I doubled each time! And as I live and hope to pay my outstanding bills—sometime—I am going to double again when the two teams meet at South Bend November twenty-first.

It is going to be a great season for the stay-at-homes, because only two games will be played out of the city. Berkeley will have a chance to water the track once more, and the Notre Dame scuffle will reach us only by radio. But for the rest we have a full season, and with such gigantics as Stanford, Washington State and Georgia scheduled for Exposition, which is now Olympic, the local boys should be able to gorge themselves on pigskin specials. The schedule follows:

Date	*Opponent*	*Place*	1930 S.C.	*Score* Opponent
Sept. 26	St. Mary's College	Olympic St'd'm.		
Oct. 3	Oregon State College	Olympic St'd'm.	27	7
Oct. 10	Wash. State College	Olympic St'd'm.	6	7
Oct. 17	University of Ore.	Olympic St'd'm.		
Oct. 24	University of Calif.	Berkeley, Calif.	74	0
Nov. 7	Stanford University	Olympic St'd'm.	41	12
Nov. 14	Univ. of Montana	Olympic St'd'm.		
Nov. 21	Univ. of Notre Dame	So. Bend, Ind.	0	27
Dec. 5	Univ. of Washington	Olympic St'd'm.	32	0
Dec. 12	Univ. of Georgia	Olympic St'd'm.		

Are Writers Gentlemen?

▼▼ Writers are presumably the cream of the artistic world. A musician is odd, a painter is crazy and an actor is downright low. But the novelists and dramatists have somehow builded a legend of honor about themselves. They are suave, sophisticated, cultured, profound and literate. They have no consideration for money and are completely immune from any craving for mass popularity. They are, in short, gentlemen of the first water. But recently I have experienced some strange misgivings about them. I am informed that

they barter like fish mongers for the sale of their manuscripts. I see Messrs. Dreiser and Lewis go cave man at Ray Long's dinner. And finally they talk infamously about their hosts.

There is little doubt that Hollywood producers have been anything if not genial and anxious hosts to literary stars. The literary stars admit it themselves. They are given palatial homes, big cars, choice liqueurs and thrilling checks. By their own confession they are on the town from the moment they arrive until the sad day of their departure. It therefore might be assumed that by way of showing appreciation of their hosts, they would treat those gentlemen with appropriate consideration. But instead they rush back to their civilized friends and indulge in horse laughs. They break into magazines at ten cents a word and spread their derision throughout the hemisphere. In short, they are guilty of shocking manners.

▼▼ IN FOLLOWING THIS course they are robbing themselves of handsome annuities, because they have not anticipated that the time rapidly is approaching when the screen will demand screen writers. They will be unable to court the golden goose because they have devoted their Hollywood visits to the beach instead of to the acquirement of screen literacy. In a recent *Spectator* Mr. Beaton came forward with a whimsical suggestion that motion picture producers buy motion pictures instead of novels and plays. Presumably it is something that no one has thought of before. It will be shocking and unkind to many who are living like the lilies on the fruits of their fictional and dramatic experience. But it will come, and when it does, a public that has been receiving picture plays will receive motion pictures, and its money will be forthcoming much more bountifully.

About Nice Girls

▼▼ AT THE RISK of being dubbed a Puritan and perhaps also a creature of repressed and unnatural desires, I raise my voice in a demand for sweeter and purer motion picture heroines. I am so weary of bad women turning good that I would almost welcome the drama of a good woman turning bad—providing she was consistent and stayed that way. In *Common Clay, Always Goodbye, Laughing Sinners and Hush Money* the heroines, all of whom are charming ladies in private life, live with gentlemen who are not their husbands. In *Salvation Nell, Confessions of a Co-Ed, American Tragedy* and *Bad Girl* the young women find themselves unfortunately about to become mothers without benefit of clergy. In *The Man in Possession* and *Free Soul* the genial processes of seduction are shown as fully as the camera and the censors will permit. In *Night Angel* the heroine is the dubious daughter of a thieving, brawling mother, and in *The Miracle Woman* she is a religious cheat. I could name more, but it is just as well to let the matter rest on an even dozen.

Surely it is not asking too much to suggest that the story be changed somewhat. Let us delay the arrival of infants until a good solid year of respectable matrimony has elapsed. Let us again see that unusual young woman who is slightly fastidious about which of her gentleman friends will occupy her bed. And for the love of heaven, bless our eyes once more with that rare cinematic specimen, the girl who has no yearning whatsoever to test love before she finally buys. I can't see where much harm could be done by at least one more *Seventh Heaven*, with the heroine sweet and lovely and the hero brave and strong. Just one experiment along these lines might work miracles out in those barren plains where box-offices stand like tombstones to deserted hopes.

▼▽ I THINK there is a psychological demand for the good old fashioned twish and twiddle which in the last decade has been so out-moded. We are all depressed—very depressed. And by way of comparison, if we think we are depressed, what about those poor devils to whom we owe money? Think for a moment of the mental depths they must have plumbed by this time! And when we consider ourselves and our creditors, we have just about the entire population of the United States wallowing in a melancholy the like of which has not been seen in the last quarter century.

We go to the theatre to forget these sordid matters. We seek the bread of escape and are handed only the stone of a highly moral type of prostitution. By the time we leave the theatre we have not only our financial woes to consider, but also the disconcerting morals of our women folk. Unless we are very young or very old, we are apt to cast surreptitious glances at our wives and sweethearts and wonder what dark secrets they are hiding beneath those smiles. Is it possible that they haven't told us—the Thing? Are they merely clever vixens such as we have seen capering about on the screen? No, of course not. But then again . . . And thus home to catch the ten o'clock news broadcast and to hear a rehash of closing market quotations from a fellow who writes dismal things for *The Wall Street Journal*.

A Book About Pictures

▼▽ LAST WEEK there fell into my clutches a copy of *Camera Secrets of Hollywood*, published here by the Camera Secrets Publishing Company, and compiled by Robert C. Bruce and Pat Dowling. It tells all about the making of pictures in language which the layman can understand, and I was particularly interested in it because of Pat Dowling's name. He is a fraternity brother of mine, who six years ago gave me some very potent advice about writing. He was with Christy at that time sending out publicity. "If you wish to write," said Mr. Dowling, "plan to starve for ten years while you are learning." In case Mr. Dowling reads this, I hereby inform him that his advice is being followed sedulously.

Mr. Bruce, whose camera studies appear in profusion throughout the volume, is the producer of *Bruce Scenic Motion Pictures*, has traveled with his camera everywhere, knows everybody, and is thoroughly alive to the dramatic and artistic potentialities of the camera, whether it be a box Brownie or a complicated Mitchell with Multicolor attachment. The experience of the years which have made Mr. Bruce one of the foremost in his profession is boiled down to a mere one hundred thirty-five pages comprising the most complete discussion of pictures, motion and otherwise, that I have seen.

▼▼ It obviously is impossible to deal generally with a book which is so filled with specific information. Suffice it to say that for the first time I am working up a genuine enthusiasm for the camera, and that I plan to get out my Kodak and try a few of the shots which the writers recommend. There are chapters devoted to exposure, the set-up, indoor exposures and a great deal about climatic and sun conditions in various latitudes. At the end of the book is a complete table of North America, telling specifically what time of year the best pictures may be taken. Thus I discover that October is the best time to take pictures along the coast district of Southern California, but that if I wish to take a scene or two in the Qu'Appelle Valley and Pasqua Lakes of Saskatchewan, I had better plan to do it in August. Not the least interesting portion of the book is the account of travels which took Bruce by canoe and motor and pack horse almost everywhere in North America, and the plane expedition over the Alps which resulted in some excellent pictures.

One chapter is devoted to the attainment of unusual effects, and there I learn that most photographs of the moon are really sun photos cleverly disguised. The moon may be successfully photographed only in the far north. Sunrises and sunsets, clouds and silhouettes, and even rainy day pictures are discussed. And most surprising of all was the information that a desert mirage may be successfully photographed if time and skill are put to the task. Another variation that I should like to try some day is that of photographing a reflection in a window pane. Anything which can be seen with the human eye is available material for a photograph, although I assume that pink elephants and snakes are out. I can recommend the book heartily to anyone even remotely interested in photography.

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Poor Solace For Musicians

(Arthur Lange in The Hollywood Filmograph)

There isn't a day goes by but that someone doesn't ask me: "What do you think is the future of music in connection with motion pictures?" I will admit that most of my questioners are idle musicians who are anxiously waiting for music to take another boom. My answer to them is not very encouraging, because I am quite sure that musicians will never again make the money they did during the years of 1929 and 1930 as far as recording for motion pictures is concerned. Musicians seem to want to forget that the mechanical age is on, and on for keeps. Progress is heartless and waits for no man, and as far as the economical condition for musicians is concerned, I am convinced that they'll have to be patient and wait for the next round. This, no doubt, will be when Television steps in definitely.

▼ ▼ ▼

A Swedish Dawn

(The 1931 Announcement of Svensk Filmindustri, Sweden)

In all picture producing companies endeavors are now centered upon a return to the expressive pictorial technic of the silent film as the foundation of a picture-story, but at the same time to keep sound—music, songs and a limited number of dialogues.

TRUMBO REVIEWS

Sincere and Profound

▼▼ *AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY.* At the outset I may as well come forward with a hideous confession. I have never read the book. The Dreiserian idiom is too much for me. Perhaps later I shall stagger through the affair, but while youth is still with me I have more interesting things to divert my attention. The controversy which attended the production of the picture was profound and much more important to pictures and to writers than is generally realized. Paramount has not failed to capitalize the tremendous ballyhoo, and for that matter, neither has Dreiser. The picture can not be judged in relation to others which are being shown over the country. Beside the general run, *An American Tragedy* is genuine art and a credit to Hollywood. When contrasted with the best in other arts, it does not reach the heights. There is ample excuse for this. Hyper-critical literary reviewers should receive it as the expression of an art which is only thirty years advanced from its source.

Not since *Strange Interlude* have I emerged from a theatre in so dismal a frame of mind. The von Sternberg direction held me from the start. By the time *Clyde Griffiths* reached his death cell I was exhausted. There is tremendous power in the story even if there is no entertainment. I am greatly puzzled by reviews it has received. Why, inquires one reviewer, should such a thing be presented as entertainment? Yet I have no doubt the same gentleman read the novel and whooped for it with a sense of righteous gusto. The same story is told in the picture as in the novel. Why was the novel offered as entertainment? And another complains that the first volume of the story was dealt with very briefly in the picture. In reply it might be well to inform the gentleman that it doesn't matter a continental how much or how little the book was skimped. Paramount and von Sternberg are making motion pictures. They have the right to select motion picture material from a book, and to treat it in any manner best calculated to advance the story. They paid handsomely for the privilege.

▼▼ THE IMMORTAL, ghastly tragedy of *Clyde Griffiths* and *Roberta Alden* is destined to live forever. The book will be forgotten and the picture scrapped, but the universal ugliness of the grotesque story will be played perpetually until those enthusiastic fellows, the biologists, relegate sex to the laboratory. The inbred weakness of a race which produces such characters is so hopeless and so universal that I have almost forgotten that Phillips Holmes and Sylvia Sidney took the leading roles, and that Irving Pichel and Lucille La Verne rendered excellent characterizations. All that I can discern is the direction of von Sternberg and the analytical mind of Dreiser dealing with material that was furnished in actual life. The picture is ponderous, slow, sometimes a little dull. It could not be otherwise without loss of sincerity. It is depressing and drab, but so were the lives of the principals and the court records of their weaknesses.

It is disconcerting to think that this is a cross section of America. Yet there is the unspeakable vulgarity of the American mob, the pitiable stupidity of the American jury, the hypocritical brutality of a legal procedure which says to condemned men, "May God have mercy on your soul." The court scene is impressive, yet one wonders vaguely what sort of government it is that permits such insincere bickering over a man's life. The highlights of the picture are a smile that Miss Sidney flashes to Holmes across the factory room, the mania on Holmes's face at the moment of the murder, and the court address of Irving Pichel.

Its weaknesses lie in too slight an account of the unfortunate boy's youth, insufficient proof of his passion for the second woman, and a slight tediousness of those court scenes wherein Holmes re-enacts the murder seated in the boat. Its weaknesses may easily be forgiven, its virtues should justly be praised, but chief credit goes neither to von Sternberg nor to Dreiser, but rather to a minute biological process involving genes, hormones and chromosomes which produce endlessly such characters as those which are celebrated in *An American Tragedy.*

A Corking Picture

▼▼ *TRANSATLANTIC* is hailed by the Fox organization as a model for future talking pictures. It is the definite form which the talking picture will evolve. This, of course, is nonsense. The screen one day will produce entertainment so vastly superior to *Transatlantic* that a comparison will be ludicrous. But for the present it is one of the finest productions to come out of Hollywood. It is a swift, intelligently done, entertaining picture. It is cast excellently. It was written directly for the screen by Guy Bolton. William K. Howard directs brilliantly and unconventionally. James Howe's camera work is so far above the average that comparison is ridiculous. Such a combination is unbeatable.

The story was a difficult one to handle, for in reality it is three stories. There is the story of Edmund Lowe, international crook, who thwarts another crook and his colleagues because he loves a girl. There is the story of Myrna Loy's successful fight for the affection of John Halliday, her husband. And there is the story of Jean Hersholt, the lens grinder, and of his daughter, Lois Moran. The smooth blending of three stories into one in the single setting of a vast liner plowing across the Atlantic in murky weather, was a task to try any director in the industry, and that he succeeded so well lends considerable esteem to Howard's reputation.

▼▼ THE OPENING sequences of the picture, which are devoid of dialogue, show the slow departure of the liner and the infiltration through the crowd of that near-madness which marks the starting point of any voyage. The camera travels everywhere through the liner, stopping slyly to watch a mother bid farewell to her cabin boy son, slipping on deck to present a gentleman in the aspect of throwing a kiss when he is really smoking a cigarette, peering through a port hole for a last glimpse of the New York skyline. From this point the story evolves rapidly and without let-down. When the ship docks, the drama has been played and the story ends.

Jean Hersholt's performance as the old lens grinder on vacation is utterly fine. He is a credit to the screen and should be studied closely by the few who seriously wish to portray sincere emotion. Edmund Lowe's work as the crook is absorbing and clever, and Myrna Loy as the embezzler's wife has a role which is new to her. She is escaping from stereotyped parts, and probably is as grateful for it as I. Lois Moran, John Halliday, Greta Nissen and Billy Bevan comprise the principals. The work of Halliday and Bevan is particularly impressive. Swift cutting, brief dialogue, excellent photography and originality of direction make *Transatlantic* an oasis in a desert of poor pictures.

Operatic Love

▼▼ *THE GREAT LOVER* presents a theme which is not at all original, but Harry Beaumont has succeeded in injecting enough new life into the story to make it a fairly entertaining picture. At any rate it was held over at the Los Angeles—an event which should put joy in the hearts of all who wish that Mr. Gumbiner's white elephant down on Broadway might succeed in fighting off the wolves. Even though I knew from the opening sequence what would happen in the final one, I remained in a state of passive entertainment and mild enjoyment. Lewis Stone did the same thing years ago in the silents, but as a pianist instead of an opera singer. Others have done it periodically for several hundred years past.

Adolphe Menjou takes the part of a world-famous opera singer who, after a lifetime of philandering, falls in love with Irene Dunn, trains her for her debut at the Metropolitan, mistakes her gratitude for love, and loses both her and his voice in one night. Neil Hamilton plays the young understudy who comes from behind to win the matrimonial race. Baclanova furnishes the menace of the affair as an old flame of Menjou's, and Cliff Edwards is an enthusiastic and laugh-provoking attaché of the opera house.

Naturally so ancient a vehicle required desperate measures, and they were resorted to most obviously in those sequences dealing with temperamental differences between the singers. I am prepared to believe that operatic stars are persons endowed with Olympian temperaments, but I can not convince myself that they are as idiotic as they are portrayed here. Nor does it seem quite probable that they would be entrusted to the care of such an outspoken and exuberant young man as Cliff Edwards. Menjou's air of suave and decadent sophistication saves the rest of the picture, although the charm of Irene Dunn has considerable to do with its success. Neil Hamilton did not have as good a role as he deserves. *The Great Lover* is light entertainment—very light—but quite good enough for people who must work during hot summer days and who at sundown seek escape in the theatre.

Far From It

▼▼ *SILENCE* is a most misleading title. I previously have commented upon the technical quality of Paramount productions. I have not, I think, added that

they are also the most voluble to be seen anywhere. There were plenty of opportunities for silent treatment in this picture, and its emotional possibilities were such that a musical score would have assisted it tremendously. Both were ignored. I faintly remember having seen this done in the old silent days, and thus its edge was dulled. One would think, judging by revivals, that Hollywood was actually short of stories instead of possessing the most imposing battery of yarn-producing literateurs in the universe.

That immaculate English gentleman, Mr. Clive Brook (I never feel right about him unless I precede his name with the title) becomes in his latest picture a thief, a carnival follower and of course a hero. The story opens in his death cell, where he is confessing to a fake priest, and then flashes back to the story of his life. The murder for which he was convicted, it develops, was really committed by his daughter in defense of her mother's honor. Everything is very complicated, but a most miraculous series of incidents at the close of the tale free him and also his daughter. The farewell scene which concludes the story is sickeningly sentimental.

Brook's only convincing work is done while he plays the old shell game at the carnival. At all other times he appears to be miscast. I am anxious to see *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, which once more will give him a part deserving of his ability. Peggy Shannon's work is not so impressive as in her first picture, but throughout the earlier scenes she was hampered by those horrible clothes women wore twenty-five years ago. I protest vehemently against the filming of female fashions between the years of 1870 and 1915. It was a period of painful evolution, and we should be spared as much of it as possible. Marjorie Rambeau as the saloon owner again justified my opinion that she is one of the most finished actresses on the screen, and Charles Starrett's work was satisfactory. Louis Gasnier and Max Marcin directed.

And It Will Sell Also

▼▼ BOUGHT entered the local lists with much less ballyhoo than *Common Law*, which also starred Constance Bennett, and by some strange twist is much better than the latter production. I say strange because the list of characters which support the star in *Bought* is not nearly so imposing as in the other production. The dialogue is not so diabolically clever, and the settings are not so imposing. And the reason lies in the story material, and of course, the first-rate direction of Archie Mayo.

The public, I think, is not particularly interested in woes which fall upon the principal character because of his own especial brand of foolishness. Complications must be forced upon him by circumstance. The sympathy of an audience is immediately aroused when a character falls under a curse which is not of his own doing. But when he rushes out and brings down upon his head the logical consequences of idiocy or laziness or moral laxity, it is tremendously difficult to become excited about his ultimate salvation. And herein lies the reason why *Bought* is an interesting and captivating story, and why *Common Law* somehow missed in spite of lavish production effort. I am not speaking of box-office.

▼▼ MISS BENNETT, whose mother and father neglected the formality of marriage, enters upon a period of deception which almost proves her undoing, but which eventually brings her to her father, Richard Bennett, and to Ben Lyon, who is her lover. Raymond Milland is the wealthy cad to whom the young lady surrenders. He handles his part with considerable skill. Richard Bennett, splendid actor and gentleman that he is, does excellently, and Ben Lyon is doing better work in each picture I view. He is an ideal leading man, and is being spared those close-ups which I am inclined to think are a serious threat to his popularity.

I have been convinced that if Miss Bennett were not given a different sort of picture her popularity would wane. I am still convinced, but *Bought*, despite the sex complications, is essentially a clean picture. Its appeal, however, is not universal, and it is not aimed at a particular class. One of these two considerations should be present in every picture. Having neither, *Bought* is likely to fall into middle ground. But nevertheless I should like to see Miss Bennett in a different setting for a change.

One of the Best

▼▼ *SPORTING BLOOD* is the most thrilling picture I have seen for months. It is the third production reviewed in this issue to which I am tempted to apply superlatives. The others are *American Tragedy* and *Transatlantic*. It was indeed an auspicious week for local theatre-goers when three such pictures ran concurrently. There is nothing profound about *Sporting Blood*, but it is so stirring that the audience was aroused from its customary lethargy to a degree that I have not seen since the advent of audible pictures. As the gun was pointed at the head of the beautiful crippled brood mare who foaled "Tommy Boy" a woman behind me shouted "Don't show that!" A little later when the colt was sold from the home stables, the deal was almost stopped by a gentleman three seats to my left who forgot himself so far as to shout "Stop!" And when the final race was shown, the natural sound effects from Churchill Downs were drowned by the applause of an audience that was having the rare treat of viewing a genuine motion picture.

There is a lesson for Hollywood hidden away in this picture. Its exquisite pathos, beautiful photography and utter cleanliness should be emulated. Certainly it is not so great nor so profound as *American Tragedy*, but incontestably it is better mass entertainment. And when I say mass entertainment, I do not mean entertainment for dumbbells. We have for too long a time aped a narrow handful of intelligentzia who believe that art must be serious, stuffy and nastily realistic. A tender, sparkling picture such as *Sporting Blood*—a picture which has in view the sole object of audience entertainment—is thoroughly creditable and an excellent example of motion picture art. Charles Brabin, who directed and also assisted in the adaptation of this story by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan, has set a high standard for himself, and if he is able to repeat he will find himself rapidly becoming one of the industry's best money-makers.

The starring honors of the picture go to "Tommy Boy" and his magnificent mother who foaled him in a rainstorm after she had slipped and broken a leg. There may be more piteous scenes stored away in the Academy library, but I am inclined to doubt. Clark Gable, billed as the star, had a rather minor role which he played with that high degree of efficiency which has marked him for stardom. Madge Evans and Ernest Torrence nearly stole the picture from him. Lew Cody as the gambler was eminently satisfactory, and Marie Prevost gave an excellent characterization of a selfish little empty-noodle. Nor should I forget Eugene Jackson, who is rapidly becoming my favorite child actor. His work is touching and genuine.

And the Secret Is—?

▼▼ *SECRETS OF A SECRETARY* is an astonishingly trivial affair. Following *Confessions of a Co-ed* it forces me to conclude that Paramount is trying

to make a cinematic MacFadden house of its organization. It may be that these lurid titles entice a certain type of person into the theatre, but I am of the opinion that a great many stay away because confessions and secrets are usually trash. And another fault with such affairs is that they do not reveal anything so shocking after all. *Confessions of a Co-Ed* was immeasurably better than *Secrets*.

It is a confession of bitter ignorance to say that this is the first time I have seen Claudette Colbert's work. From the critical reports I know that she is a young lady of much ability. From this, my first personal experience, I can testify that her beauty is completely satisfying. But the picture presents her in a story which must be beneath her ability. Not for a moment is there any doubt that she is the star, but her sacrifice to save the reputation of Betty Lawford appears so senseless and inconsequential that the dramatic values are lost. Miss Lawford—and I always speak of characterizations—is a trivial little package who deserves practically nothing. It is distressing when she receives so much, even though Miss Colbert succeeds admirably in working the whole nasty black-mailing affair through to a satisfactory and happy ending.

▼▼ Georges Metaxa has the thankless role of a blackmailer, and as reward for an excellent piece of acting he receives a bullet in the chest. The solution to his murder and the salvation of the reputation of the Misses Colbert and Lawford come too conveniently with the suicide of the elevator boy who really did the dirt. George Abbott has directed the story ably enough, but he was handed poor material. There is nothing radically wrong with the picture except that it is downright insipid. I almost am beginning to believe the wail of producers that there is a shortage of story material. How such a shortage can exist is beyond my powers of comprehension, but that it does exist is admirably attested by the release of scores of such trivial bits of froth as *Secrets of a Secretary*.

And as an afterthought: Is it possible that Paramount is trying to save money so desperately that it feels it must shoot practically everything indoors? And such being the case, does it think that stories such as *Secrets* are the only ones adaptable to indoor work?

Eternal Feminine

▼▼ *WOMEN GO ON FOREVER* gives us again that splendid actress, Clara Kimball Young, in a story that is fairly interesting and with a surrounding cast that lends considerable enjoyment to the production. It is a happy sign to see such veterans as Miss Dressler, Miss Rambeau and Miss Young carrying their own feature productions and carrying them well. Their work shows the finesse of long experience, and proves that a svelte figure and soulful eyes are not the prime requisites for audience entertainment. Which is not to infer that Miss Young's beautiful orbs have suffered with the years, for they are still expressive and lovely.

The story deals with the occurrences in Miss Young's boarding house, and gives the men a very poor break from start to finish. The travails of the colored maid who lost her husband after having had him only four days, the woes of the newly married couple with the lesser half out of work, the sorrows of delightful Marian Nixon with her chosen one, the intense and ludicrous sufferings of Eddie Lambert, while his wife is experiencing child-birth, and finally the tribulations of Miss Young, who has an insatiable appetite for men who mistreat her, set the male contingent in a very poor light. Paul Page and Maurice Murphy handle their parts with considerable finish, and with Clara and Marian comprise the leading characters.

▼▼ Women Go On Forever is far from a memorable production. One feels that the whole affair has been a little stinted for money, that it was rushed through a little too quickly. The excellent title gives an idea of the dramatic dénouement which might have been achieved, but which somehow was missed. Nevertheless it is an entertaining picture, and should particularly please those women who feel that on their fragile shoulders are carried the sorrows of the world. Miss Young's portrayal of a hard- boiled lady who is so chicken-hearted that she mothers her entire household is excellent, and she rises at times to genuine drama. Unless I am badly mistaken she will find herself with plenty of character roles during the coming season. Director Walter Lang rather spoiled the ending by having her ogle a little too passionately at the newest male boarder. Her work throughout the picture is too sincere for such a forced and unnatural conclusion. It is a James Cruze production released through Tiffany.

An Independent Surprise

▼▼ *MOTHER AND SON*, the latest Monogram production, held considerable interest for me. It is, as everyone knows, the product of a studio which goes in almost entirely for horse opera. I talked with Trem Carr about the picture before it was released. He told me that it was a departure from the usual studio policy and that its progress would be watched with considerable interest. I think major executives might well spend some time on the Monogram lot, particularly when a picture such as *Mother and Son* is in production. The length of time spent in shooting, the total cost of production, and the number of retakes probably are sixty per cent under the average of the large studios. It is essentially a quickie, designed for an audience that will accept quickies. But actually it is a very finished little production, and I can name a number of pictures from the larger studios that cost more and hold considerably less interest.

The story deals with Clara Kimball Young's career in Reno as *Faro Lil*, her desertion of the gambling tables that her infant son might not suffer from her social stigma, the eventual collapse of her tidy fortune, and her return to the Reno of to-day. A situation of genuine dramatic quality is developed between the returned gambling queen and her son, who has gone to Yale and made very ritzy friends. Particularly interesting are those sequences in which Miss Young blazes forth at Wall Street gambling in contrast with Reno gambling. A fine logic runs through the affair, which in these troublous times should appeal to the many who are suffering from Wall Street's blunders. There are, of course, illogical sequences, particularly that one in which the banker attempts to recoup his market losses at faro. That simply isn't being done. The same crisis could have been developed had he requested a loan from the gambling house mistress.

There are portions of the picture which could have been cut more rigorously, and a scene or two which betray the quickie origin of the production. But on the whole *Mother and Son* is a very creditable picture, comparable to many that are more expensive, and setting a mark for Monogram to shoot at if it continues to foray into the field of sex and social melodrama. The direction is by J. P. MacCarthy, and Bruce Warren, Mildred Golden, John Elliott and Gordon D. Wood carry the principal roles.

Very Elementary

▼▼ *THE MYSTERY OF LIFE* professes to inform all who wish to know them the secrets of existence, and particularly the origin of life. This is a very large assignment, and it is only natural that failure of a sort should attend its production. What really appears on the screen is a series of cuts from other pictures, shots of animals which are interesting enough, a few diagrams such as may be found in any text book, and a rather complete series of the evolution of certain species within their own particular bounds. The vastness of the question, which is naturally beyond the scope of an hour and a half of pictures, is barely scraped.

The trouble with such a picture is that it can not truly represent the entire scientific attitude. It can present only one phase of that attitude. The whole realm of biology is embroiled within itself, so that anything of this type must necessarily represent individual conclusions. Dr. H. M. Parshley, for example, explains the differences of the phyla and genera solely on the theory of mutation. It is a very broad assumption, and one that is challenged almost constantly by men whose scholarly achievements equal

those of Dr. Parshley. Clarence Darrow chatters futilely through the scenes. He is an amateur scientist who is likely to become a pest. Brilliant lawyer though he may be, it is a little puzzling to discover by what mental processes he imagines himself a biologist. The truth is that he has permitted himself to become the flaming apostle of the scientific attitude. His behavior at Dayton, Tennessee, was almost as ridiculous as Mr. Bryan's. In many ways he is a counterpart of the Commoner, save only that he is on the other side of the fence. He lends nothing but box-office attraction to *The Mystery of Life*.

▼▼ As a very elemental outline of the theory of evolution the picture is probably successful enough. But it misses the most vital part of the argument for evolution because it realizes that the vital part is the most vulnerable. The only positive proof of evolution must be gained from fossils. The amoeba, paramecium and others of the Protozoans do not leave fossils. The first primitive grouping of these animals into colonies, and their eventual union into those somatic bodies from which the phyla were derived, must therefore be a matter of speculation. It can never be proved by fossil remains, because the delicate structure of these minute organisms leave no impression. The progenitors of *Mystery of Life* make no admission of this fact, and resultantly they eliminate one of the most powerful arguments for the advancement of their theory.

A study of the phyla as represented on earth to-day furnishes a very convincing summary of evolution in progress. Particularly the development of the linear, dendritic and eventually the spheroid colonies leading up to the definite establishment of a group of cells into a body,—the amazing development of the coelenteron, and finally the appearance of the specialized organs and glands. But all of this is passed up in the picture. Mitosis is shown only as a diagram. The picture is welded together by skilful argument, and presents a ready made opinion for the uninformed. It is distinctly for those who do not wish to drink deeply.

(Phew! I'm glad that's over!)—W. B.

Reviewed in this Number

▼ ▼

AGE FOR LOVE—

A Caddo production, released by United Artists. Directed by Frank Lloyd; from the novel by Ernest Pascal; adaptation by Ernest Pascal; dialogue by R. E. Sherwood; photography by Harry Fischbeck; recording engineer, Frank Grenzbach; assistant director, William Tummell; art director, Richard Day; musical director, Alfred Newman; production manager, Charles Stallings; film editor, W. Duncan Mansfield.

The cast: Billie Dove, Charles Starrett, Edward Everett Horton, Adrian Morris, Jed Prouty, Charles Sellon, Andre Beranger, Count Pierre de Ramey, Lois Wilson, Mary Duncan, Betty Ross Clarke, Joan Standing, Alice Moe, Vivien Oakland, Cecil Cunningham.

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Josef von Sternberg; based on the novel of the same name by Theodore Dreiser; screen play by Samuel Hoffenstein; photographed by Lee Garmes.

The cast: Phillips Holmes, Sylvia Sidney, Frances Dee, Irving Pichel, Frederick Burton, Claire McDowell, Wallace Middleton, Vivian Winston, Emmett Corrigan, Lucille LaVerne, Charles B. Middleton, Albert Hart, Fanny Midgley, Arline Judge, Evelyn Pierce, Arnold Korff, Elizabeth Forrester, Russell Powell, Imboden Parrish, Richard Cramer.

BOUGHT—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Archie Mayo; story by Harriett Henry; adaptation and dialogue by Charles Kenyon and Raymond Griffith; photographed by Ray June; film editor, George Marks.

The cast: Constance Bennett, Ben Lyon, Richard Bennett, Dorothy Peterson, Raymond Milland, Doris Lloyd, Maude Eburne, Mae Madison, Clara Blandick, Arthur Stuart Hull, Edward J. Nugent, Paul Porcasi.

GREAT LOVER—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Harry Beaumont; based on the play produced by Cohan and Harris; written by Leo Dietrichstein and Frederick and Fanny Hatton; dialogue and continuity by Gene Markey and Edgar Allen Woolf; recording director, Douglas Shearer; photographed by Merritt B. Gerstad; art director, Cedric Gibbons; wardrobe by Rene Hubert; film editor, Helene Warne.

The cast: Adolphe Menjou, Irene Dunne, Ernest Torrence, Neil Hamilton, Baclanova, Cliff Edwards, Hale Hamilton, Roscoe Ates, Herman Bing, Elsa Janssen.

HARD HOMBRE—

An Allied picture. Directed by Otto Brower; screen play by Jack Natteford; photographed by Harry Neumann; edited by Mildred Johnston: supervised by Sidney Algier; produced by M. H. Hoffman Jr.

The cast: Hoot Gibson, Lina Basquette, Mathilde Comont, Jessie Arnold, G. Raymond Nye, Christian Frank, Jack Byron, Frank Winklemann, Fernando Galvez, Rose Gore, Bill Robbins.

MERELY MARY ANN—

A Fox picture. Directed by Henry King; story by Israel Zangwill; screen play by Jules Furthman; photographed by John Seitz; recording engineer, E. Clayton Ward; assistant director, Charles Woolstenhulme; settings by William Darling.

The cast: Janet Gaynor, Charles Farrell, Beryl Mercer, G. P. Huntley, Jr., J. M. Kerrigan, Tom Whiteley, Lorna Balfour, Arnold Lucy.

MIRACLE WOMAN—

A Columbia picture. Directed by Frank Capra; story by John Meehan and Robert Riskin; adaptation by Dorothy Howell and Jo Swerling; dialogue by Jo Swerling; photographed by Joseph Walker; recording engineer, Glen Rominger; film editor, Maurice Wright.

The cast: Barbara Stanwyck,

David Manners, Sam Hardy, Beryl Mercer, Russell Hopton, Charles Middleton, Eddie Boland, Thelma Hill, Aileen Carlyle.

MONKEY BUSINESS—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Norman McLeod; from the story by Sam Perelman and Will B. Johnstone; dialogue by Arthur Sheekman; photographed by Arthur Todd.

The cast: Groucho Marx, Harpo Marx, Zeppo Marx, Chico Marx, Ruth Hall, Thelma Todd, Tom Kennedy, Harry Woods, Rockliffe Fellowes.

MOTHER AND SON—

A Trem Carr picture. Directed by John P. McCarthy; story by Wellwyn Totman; photographed by Archie Stout.

The cast: Clara Kimball Young, Bruce Warren, Mildred Golden, John Elliott, Ernie Hillard, C. D. Wood.

MYSTERY OF LIFE—

A Universal picture. Directed by George Cochrane; edited by W. W. Young.

SECRETS OF A SECRETARY—

A Paramount picture. Directed by George Abbott; story by Charles Brackett; adaptation by George Abbott and Dwight Taylor; dialogue by Dwight Taylor; photographed by George Folsey; recording engineer, Harold Fingerlin; film editor, Helene Turner.

The cast: Claudette Colbert, Herbert Marshall, Georges Metaxa, Betty Lawford, Mary Boland, Berton Churchill, Averell Harris, Betty Garde, Hugh O'Connell.

SILENCE—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Louis Gasnier and Max Marcin; story by Max Marcin; photographed by Charles Rosher.

The cast: Clive Brook, Marjorie Rambeau, Peggy Shannon, Charles Starrett, Willard Robertson, John Wray, Frank Sheridan, Paul Nicholson, John Craig, J. M. Sullivan, Charles Trowbridge, Ben Taggart, Wade Boteler, Robert Homans.

SPORTING BLOOD—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Charles Brabin; story by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan; adaptation and dialogue by Willard Mack and Wanda Tuchock; photographed by Harold Rosson.

The cast: Clark Gable, Ernest Torrence, Madge Evans, Lew Cody, Marie Prevost, Harry Holman, Hallam Cooley, J. Farrell McDonald, John Larkin, Eugene Jackson.

STREET SCENE—

A Samuel Goldwyn production, released by United Artists. Directed by King Vidor, from the Elmer Rice Pulitzer Prize drama of the same name; photographed by George Barnes; assistant director, Lucky Humberstone; art director, Richard Day; film editor, Hugh Bennett.

The cast: Sylvia Sidney, William Collier, Jr., Max Montor, David Landau, Estelle Taylor, Russell Hopton, Walter Miller, Greta Granstedt, Beulah Bondi, T. H. Manning, Matthew McHugh, Adele Watson, John M. Qualen, Anna Kostant, Nora Cecil, Margaret Robertson, Lambert Rogers, Allan Fox, George Humbert, Eleanor Wesshoeft.

THE SPIDER—

A Fox picture. Directed by William Cameron Menzies and Kenneth MacKenna; from the play by Fulton Oursler and Lowell Brentano; continuity and dialogue by Barry Conners and Philip Klein; photographed by James Wong Howe; recording engineer, Alfred Bruzlin; assistant director, R. L. Selander; associate producer, William Sistrom.

The cast: Edmund Lowe, Lois Moran, El Brendel, John Arledge, George E. Stone, Earle Foxe, Howard Phillips, Manya Roberti, Kendall McComas, Purnell Pratt, William Pawley, Jesse de Vorska, Warren Hymer, Ruth Donnelly.

TRANSATLANTIC—

A Fox picture. Directed by William K. Howard; story, adaptation and dialogue by Guy Bolton; additional dialogue by Lynn Starling; photographed by James Howe.

The cast: Edmund Lowe, Lois Moran, John Halliday, Greta Nissen, Jean Hersholt, Myrna Loy, Earle Foxe, Billy Bevan, Ruth Donnelly, Goodee Montgomery, Jesse de Vorska, Claude King, Crauford Kent, Henry Sedley, Louis Natheaux, Bob Montgomery.

WOMEN GO ON FOREVER—

A Tiffany-Cruze picture. Directed by Walter Lang; story by Daniel N. Rubin; photographed by Charles Schoenbaum.

The Cast: Clara Kimball Young, Marian Nixon, Paul Page, Thomas Jackson, Yola d'Avril, Eddie Lambert, Nellie V. Nichols, Morgan Wallace, Maurice Black, Lorin Baker, Maurice Murphy.

▼ ▼ ▼

Film Love

(Alexander Bakshy, The Nation)

What has always puzzled me is the mentality of the audience that accepts this sentimental love as readily as it does the most outspoken and lurid sex. Is there any underlying unity between the two? Does not the extreme primitiveness of the emotional and intellectual content of this love reveal itself also in the ready acquiescence of the audience to sex au naturel, without the benefit of even a figleaf? Ours is the age of naturalness, and boys and girls of today know more about birth control than their parents ever practiced. It is even possible to come across such scenes as I once encountered in an Automat of all places, where an angelic-looking young thing was listening reverently to a boy of twenty reading out passages from a book on sex and accompanying them with detailed comments on the mechanics of contraception. After all, if love is only that, one may just as well be frank about it.

Meaning——?

(Variety)

Filmdom's biggest step around as marked by recent occurrences is the ascendancy of eastern thought above the traditional studio influence, according to official observations. This extraordinary transition of power is proving a surprising revelation even to those so newly empowered. Persistent inquiry reveals the changes, which have come suddenly and only within the past few months, as being propelled by conditions besides bankers' influence.

The Foreign Market

(Film Renter, London)

How difficult it is these days for Hollywood really to cater for Europe is shown by the experience of the buyer for the Pittaluga organization of Italy who out of a total of 180 films viewed in the U.S.A. could only find some 20 which he considered suitable for showing in his own country.

Baiting the Church

(To-Day's Cinema, London)

If the cinemas, imperfect as they are, can attract the young folk, and the old ones for the matter of that, from the Churches, it is simply and solely because the Churches have nothing of fundamental importance to say to a post-war generation. The cinema has at least given the world *All Quiet* and one or two other almost equally fine testaments. The Churches have given it—what?

Type Standardization

(Jack Alicoate in The Film Daily)

We hate to become personal, but we do sometimes wonder if the good old public is being fed up, like we are, with seeing the same stars in the same roles day after day.

MY LETTER TO MR. PRODUCER

"Football for the Fan"

with HOWARD JONES and 25 Leading Coaches

Not one major producing organization could see this idea when I offered it to them—BUT Al Mannon, Tec-Arts supervising head not only believed in the idea but had confidence to produce them.

Now the theatres of these major producing organizations have contracted to run the complete series of six.

I have other eggs in my basket of ideas—money-making ones. Provide a spot on your date calendar—I'll be seein' ya soon.

NORMAN L. SPER

My office address is 6149 Glen Towers

My office telephone—Hempstead 2686

IN HOLLYWOOD
THEY ASK IF IT IS
A ROBERTSON DOG

Welford Beaton
EDITOR
Robert E. Sherwood
ASSOCIATE

HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

SEPT. 26, 1931

Correct Place for Metro to Start Deflating

Contract Squabble from Two Viewpoints

Direction and Story—Which Is Important?

Sherwood's Notes From The Eastern Seaboard

Reviewed in This Number

CAUGHT
BAD GIRL
GUILTY HANDS
STREET SCENE
EAST OF BORNEO
TOO MANY COOKS
PUBLIC DEFENDER
TRAVELING HUSBANDS

▼

WICKED
HUSH MONEY
STAR WITNESS
HOMICIDE SQUAD
SPORTING BLOOD
THIS MODERN AGE
WATERLOO BRIDGE
MURDER AT MIDNIGHT

PRICE 15 CENTS

PORTRAIT STUDY

MRS. FRANK BORZAGE

By MELBOURNE SPURR

The Editor's Views

Strangers May Hiss

LOUIS B. MAYER was furious at me because I called *Strangers May Kiss* what it is, a filthy picture that any producing organization should be ashamed to turn out, a pornographic indecency that showed to what steps producers would sink to make money. For a long time I kept track of the published reviews of this picture. No reviewer seemed to get het-up over it like I did, but a letter from a New York newspaper friend brings me to-day some interesting information.

No other picture produced during the past twelve months has done the film industry as much injury as has been caused by *Strangers May Kiss*. Protests against its uncleanliness have poured into the Hays office in an unprecedented volume. Women's clubs, parent-teachers' associations and organizations of a similar nature which interest themselves in the moral well-being of our growing generation, have registered their indignation in numerous ways.

▼▼ METRO PROBABLY made money out of *Strangers May Kiss* as a definite production unit, but the fact that a lot of its other pictures have not drawn so well probably can be traced to the effect on the public mind of that smutty production. It is a safe bet also that it is responsible for a loss by other producers and exhibitors that totals several million dollars.

There is no permanent profit in marketing smut.

Dialogue

WE'VE GIVEN dialogue four years to demonstrate that it is a legitimate element of screen art, and for every flop we had in silent days we have four now. This would indicate that it is four times as hard to make a talkie that the public will like as it was to make a silent that would do well at the box-office. Let us assume that the producers were right artistically in ceasing to tell their stories visually and in going over bodily to dialogue as their story-telling medium. Certainly at the time they did it we heard a great deal of talk about screen art at last having come into its own, that the ability to talk was all that was needed to make it perfect. Let us agree that everything the *Spectator* has had to say about dialogue was just so much rot and that producers showed good artistic judgment in paying no attention to the nuts who said that they were making a mistake.

Let us get commercial for a moment, after granting the artistic wisdom of the screen's wholesale surrender to dialogue. Producers always have told us that making pictures is a business, and they have scoffed at those who insisted that the screen was an art. Was it good business for them to embrace a new element, no matter what artistic justification there was for it, that resulted in their making four flops for every one they used to make?

Purely an Advertisement

MY ADVENTURE in business—the offer of my services as a story consultant—as announced in the last *Spectator*, has given me a busy two weeks. It has brought to me several stories that needed but little readjustments to make them salable. With two of these stories the results were spectacular for the promptness with which success was achieved. In each instance the story was one that a studio said it would purchase if a certain weakness was overcome. One conference straightened out the first one, and three the second.

The author of the first story telephoned me this morning that she had received her check. This made me curious about the fate of the other. I telephoned its author, who informed me that it had been accepted and that the requisition for its purchase had gone through.

▼▼ IT SEEMS necessary for me to state again that I can not read stories for contingent fees. I can read only those for which my fees have been paid in advance. If I attempted to do otherwise I would be swamped with manuscripts. It is my desire to develop writers whom I discover by reading screen stories, and to assist those who already have arrived and who sometimes encounter difficulties in maintaining the easy flow of their stories.

It is interesting work. Granting the presumption of some knowledge of screen requirements on the part of a writer, the writing of a screen story is not a hard job if the fundamental principles of the art are observed. I endeavor to acquaint my clients with these principles to equip them to write motion

WELFORD BEATON, EDITOR VOL. 12, NO. 8 ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, ASSOCIATE
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pictures. The studios are hungry for stories and always will be, although each of them already owns enough to keep it going for years. Writing originals is a lucrative profession, and I am trying to help people to be proficient in it.

Film Insanities

WHAT IS YOUR favorite film insanity? That there is a story shortage? The supervisor system? Employment of stage directors? Comedy relief? Insistence on happy endings? Making pictures by the retake system? That the general depression is responsible for the box-office slump? Telling stories in dialogue? That Jack Gilbert is done? There are

a lot of others that can be added to the list. Among them there must be one that you regard as the prize insanity. What is it? Mine is the one about musicals "coming back."

As an entertainment force the screen always has consisted of almost equal parts of pictures and music. That is just one of the things that never was understood by those who draw enormous salaries from the film industry on the assumption that they possess sufficient knowledge to justify them. When the screen went talkie, the high-priced executives lost their heads completely. They eliminated the two partners that had contributed so much to the success of screen art—imagination and music. They thought the screen had gone stage, and as music does not play while actors read lines on the stage, synchronized scores were ruled out before they even were tried. If production executives were worth one-tenth of the salaries they draw, there never would have been a picture released without a synchronized musical score.

▼▼ BUT THE PRODUCERS did not deny us music altogether. They handled it with such shameful ignorance that the knowledge that there was music in a picture was enough to keep the public away from it. And the producers, with that smug complacency that makes them so ridiculous, cut out the music and gave as a reason their opinion that the public, having enjoyed it for all the thousands of years that there has been any public, suddenly had lost its taste for music. And just as gravely the same producers tell us now that the public as suddenly has regained its taste for music.

It is a pitiful spectacle, this one of such people being entrusted with the task of operating the producing organizations in a manner that will yield profits to stockholders. Perhaps the explanation is that the stockholders are as great fools as the people they employ.

Correcting Irving

THERE SEEMS to be an impression in film circles that the general adoption of the unit plan of production would mean the supremacy of the independent producer and the practical disintegration of the existing large producing organizations. Unit production does not mean any such revolution. We may have a few more independently made features than we have now, but the bulk of the product will continue to be turned out by the big organizations. It is inevitable that ultimately all the Paramount product will be made under the unit plan, but that does not mean that Paramount will go out of business or that its studio will be any less busy than it is now.

Unit production, as inaugurated by Paramount, will mean that it will contract with writers and directors to make pictures for it on its own lot and with money provided by Paramount. The stories will be approved by the studio to avoid too many of the same kind being made, and the studio probably will be consulted about the cast and certainly will be about the cost. Then with these things settled, the real maker of the picture, be he director or writer, will be left alone to make his picture, and will share in the profit it makes when it is shown throughout the world. That is all that unit production means—noninterference.

▼▼ SOME WEEKS ago Irving Thalberg, in an interview in the *Los Angeles Times*, expressed the opinion that the lack of capital was the most serious obstacle that unit production had to overcome. I am afraid that Irving doesn't know what is meant by unit production. His own organization and the other big ones own strings of theatres that they must keep open. It is to their interest to see that plenty of pictures are made, and they cheerfully will put up the money necessary to make them. They'll have to.

When you come to think of it, though, the general adoption of the unit system will cause quite a revolution. It will mean that all pictures will be made by people who know how to make pictures. That will seem odd.

A Great Idea

THE COMPLETE Paramount Story Council consists of A. M. Botsford, Russell Holman, Miles Gibbons, D. A. Doran, Jr., Maurice Hanline, Maude K. Miller, H. A. Wohl, Jay Gourney and Albert Deane. These outstanding judges of picture material, all of whom have gained fame through their contributions to the art of making motion pictures, will give advice to such amateurs and inexperienced people as Ben Schulberg, Ernst Lubitsch, Josef von Sternberg, Frank Tuttle, John Cromwell, Richard Wallace, Rouben Mamoulian, and other young chaps who are trying to get along

on the Paramount lot. I think it is very nice of Mr. Zukor to have a committee of advertising men, press agents and film salesmen to tell Mr. Lubitsch just what sort of material he needs when he starts out to make a good motion picture. And there is a humane angle to the plan: it reduces the work of the people in the Paramount office who count the receipts.

▼▼ IT'S DIFFERENT with Winnie Sheehan. Behind his smiling Irish face there lurks a cruel disposition. He doesn't care how he overworks the people who count the Fox receipts. He

stupidly permits his big directors to select their material and make their pictures in their own way. Some day he may relent and have a committee on selection composed of his barber, chauffeur, a studio gateman, a prop boy, and a couple of members of his publicity department.

And take Junior Laemmle. That foolish boy has no committee to help him. He selects his own material and insists upon horning in on its preparation, the folly of which is reflected in the pictures that he has turned out, such trash as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Seed*. *Waterloo Bridge*, *Dracula*, *Strictly Dishonorable*, *East of Borneo* and several others that drive ticket sellers frantic and ushers to the verge of collapse.

Janet and Charlie

WHY DOES THE public flock past box-offices when Janet Gaynor and Charlie Farrell appear together in a motion picture? There is a psychologically sound answer to the question, but we may differ as to what the answer is. If it were only the acting of the two, their screen personalities and whatever pictorial value the camera brings out, the public could satisfy its yearnings by seeing them apart. But the public has shown its preference for seeing them together. As we look into the matter I think we find the solution of the whole star-making problem.

My opinion is that the public wants to see Janet and Charlie together because it discovered them together, because it made joint stars of them without any prodding or urging by press agents. They were not forced on the attention of picture

patrons. *Seventh Heaven*, still my favorite of all the pictures I have seen, was offered to the public with unknown people in it. The public accepted it eagerly and hailed the two young people who carried the principal roles. It felt that it had discovered something that Hollywood itself had overlooked. It took Janet and Charlie to its heart, made them stars, and has been loyal to them ever since. It was present when the two first made love, and it feels a proprietary interest in all their subsequent love affairs.

▼▼ HOLLYWOOD CAN'T make stars. It thinks it can, but by its method of trying it will get nowhere. Both Fox and Paramount are endeavoring to force girls on the public, and both are going to fail. If Helen Mack (Fox) or Peggy Shannon (Paramount) is destined to become a star, she will get there sooner if her studio will give the public a chance to discover her. My personal opinion is that neither girl is of star calibre, and if the future proves that the opinion is a poor one, I will be delighted.

There is a simple method by which I think Hollywood can create stars, provided always that the candidates for the honor have the qualities that entitle them to it. The success of the late Lon Chaney showed that there are no physical or age limits to stardom. He was another whom the public discovered. There is a little fellow in Hollywood who could become as great a box-office success as Chaney was, if some wise producer handled him wisely. I refer to George E. Stone, the sewer rat of *Seventh Heaven*, Sol Levy of *Cimarron*, and the condemned murderer of *Front Page*. He has the divine spark that a star must have. If I had the job of making a star of Stone, I would select stories in which there were great characterizations for him, and then I would bill him in small type and not allow a line of publicity to go out about him. I would treat him as if he were of no importance, and leave to the public the discovery that he was of vast importance. It is good salesmanship to lead the public to think it knows more about your business than you do. The public always would have a warm spot in its heart for Stone. "I discovered him," it would boast. "Those poor dubs out in Hollywood didn't know how good he is."

And, in my opinion, that is the way we should go about making our stars.

Advertising

THE SPECTATOR is making a strenuous effort to reduce its reliance for support upon what advertising patronage it can secure from the personnel of the motion picture industry. Its pages show striking progress. For the past three or four years it has been without an equal as an advertising medium for those who wish to bring themselves to the attention of film executives, as it is the only paper all of them read, but it always was distasteful to it to try to coax advertisements from those whose work in pictures it criticised. It had to do it, however, or go out of business. It still wants all the professional advertising it can get on its merits as the most potent medium the industry has available, but it does not want picture people to carry the whole load.

A carefully organized campaign to secure commercial advertising is being carried out energetically. In each issue you can see what success we are having. If you have a friendly feeling for the *Spectator*, you can be of invaluable service to it by patronizing some of the firms whose announcements appear in its pages. If we can show our advertisers results they will continue to buy space. You are under no obligation to do anything for the *Spectator* beyond paying for the copy you read, but if you feel like doing a little more, patronizing its advertisers would be a nice thing to do. It would be appreciated.

Metro's Methods

THE EXHIBITORS who met some weeks ago in New York to protest against the increase in price of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer product for the current picture year, and suggested as a cure of all film evils that the salaries of directors and actors should be reduced, revealed that they have but slight knowledge of the conditions that are responsible for the present box-office depression. Nor did Felix Feist, in combatting their arguments, present a sound one himself when he claimed that more money was needed to put more quality into the product. As Metro now is spending twice what it should spend on every picture it makes, and by Feist's own confession is losing enormous sums on many of its productions,

there is no hope of its doing better either artistically or financially if it spent still more money.

I haven't the slightest doubt that Metro applauds the action of exhibitors in criticising the salaries of directors and actors. Such criticism is a convenient herring to draw across the trail that leads to the real source of the industry's unsatisfactory condition. As a matter of fact, directors and actors are the only ones of the high-salaried class who earn what is paid them. Their occupations come under the heading of extremely hazardous, as they always are exposed to the blighting influence of executive stupidity which has been responsible for the ruin of so many careers. They must get theirs as rapidly as possible for they don't know at what moment the blight will overtake them.

▼▼ IF THE EXHIBITORS had complained of the salaries paid to executives, they would have come nearer to hitting the mark, but still they would have been a long way from the

real cause of their own dissatisfaction. The size of the executive salaries is not important. What matters is that they are not earned.

I think I know practically all the high-priced executives in the film business. There may be a few connected with the administration end of their companies who earn perhaps one-quarter of the salaries paid them; but among all the production executives, those who control the making of pictures upon which the industry's entire financial structure rests—and, incidentally, those whose abilities I am in a position to estimate—there is not one who is worth to his company more than one-tenth of the amount paid him . . . . Since I wrote the last sentence one of the minor executives telephoned to ask me if I had read a certain book. I happen to know that his salary is $1,250 per week. To no other industry in the country would he be considered to be worth $125 per week.

The measure of a man's worth to the company that hires him is that of his worth to society as a whole. Our worth to our employers is not estimated basically by what we contribute to them. It is what we contribute to society that fixes our worth, and our employers merely are the middlemen who make a profit on turning over to society what we create. It is when we apply this standard to our motion picture executives that we arrive at a knowledge of what a small fraction of their salaries is earned by them. The salaries of all of them are up in the thousands and not half a dozen of them are worth to society one hundred per week.

▼▼ LET US LOOK at the facts that we have at hand to support this contention. The financial condition of the industry is in a worse state than it has been at any previous time in its history. The condition has not been brought about by studio extravagance. For thirty years the industry has prospered on a diet consisting largely of the most absurd extravagance that ever characterized an American business. Obviously merely a continuance of this extravagance could not cause a change so suddenly as to bring the industry within a period of two years from the highest point of its prosperity to the lowest level it ever has reached. A total of millions of dollars is paid annually in salaries to executives whose duty it is to see that the industry keeps out of just the sort of mess it finds itself in now. Obviously the salaries are not earned.

And yet in no other industry can we find an array of executives who make a more honest effort to earn what is paid them, who display greater energy or who are more absorbed in their work. True, none of them is actuated by a feeling of loyalty to the organization that employs him, but each is loyal to his own ambition which can be achieved only if his work be such as will earn for him a bigger and better job some place else. It is not even a lack of brains that is responsible for the lack of executives to measure up to the size of their salary checks.

▼▼ THE WHOLE TROUBLE is that our production executives are in the wrong business. They may know something, but they don't know how to make motion pictures. If they did, there would be no box-office slump. That is a fact that all the arguments, alibis and excuses in the world can't alter. Executive inefficiency, and nothing else, precipitated the present financial plight of the industry. That is the evil at which the criticism of the exhibitors should have been aimed.

From some source Metro must receive more revenue if it is to continue to make its pictures under the system that has prevailed on the lot since the present executives have reigned there. It is the most wildly absurd system that could be conceived. As Metro itself confesses, the system is turning out a lot of pictures that do not bring back their production cost; but even if it yielded only successes, there still would be no excuse for it. The retake system is a substitute for the functioning of picture brains. The money that retakes cost would go to the stockholders in the shape of dividends if those in charge of production were worth one-quarter what the company pays them in salary and percentage.

▼▼ METRO, HOWEVER, tries to conserve the interests of its stockholders by penalizing exhibitors. Unaware of the fact that the dwindling of the drawing power of its pictures is due to its grossly extravagant method of making them, it thinks

that its way out is to be still more extravagant. It, therefore, seeks to make exhibitors pay the cost of its incompetence. It practically remakes half its pictures. Even if it succeeds finally in making a good picture, it achieves only what it should have achieved in the first attempt. The Metro treasury is being milked dry by excessive executive salaries that are not earned and by grotesque inefficiency for which there is no excuse. Comparing it with the product of the other studios, Metro perhaps has reason to be satisfied with the quality of

its product, but it has no reason to be satisfied with the amount of money it spends to obtain the quality.

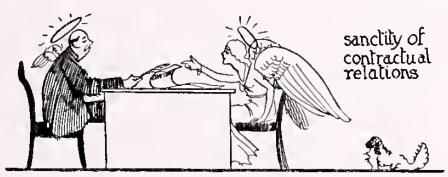
The growls that eminated from the assembled exhibitors are but the forerunners of thunder that soon will be heard. United Artists is paying Gloria Swanson $250,000 to appear in a picture. How long do you suppose exhibitors will tolerate such insanity as that? How long will the public underwrite it? That is one instance of a player being overpaid, but there aren't many such outstanding cases.

When I started this article I thought I was going to end it with a list of typical insane things that each of the big organizations has to its credit, but as I look over my notes I decide that it would use up too much space. Anyway, what's the use?

Contracts

THERE IS SOMETHING to be said for the producers when the Stanwycks, Cagneys and others run out on contracts. Columbia had spent a lot of money building Barbara Stanwyck to star proportions, and had sold her to exhibitors. It had a right to expect her to perform her part of their mutual contract, and Harry Cohn's indignation was justified. Also justified is the agreement among producers that none of them will hire Barbara until she composes her differences with Harry. On such matters as this, the sanctity of contractual relations, it is fit and proper that the producers should stand together.

But let us suppose that it was Harry Cohn who wanted to break the contract with Barbara. Suppose Barbara wanted to stay in pictures. What would Harry have done? Would



he have argued that the contract was a sacred obligation that must be held inviolate, and that no matter how unadvantageous he found its terms to be to him, there was for him no way out of it with honor? Don't make me laugh. Harry merely would have told Barbara to go chase herself, and then he would have telephoned his pals that potent message that has ruined scores of careers: "Lay off Stanwyck." Barbara, finding it impossible to secure work in any other studio, would have been compelled to submit to any terms that Columbia wished to impose.

▼▼ THE HOBART HENLEY incident is a case in point. Although he is a capable box-office director, Warners wanted to break its contract with him. It simply ceased paying him the salary the contract called for, and asked him what he was going to do about it. Probably much to the surprise of Warners, Henley promptly took the case to court. Warners countered with blackmail as vile as any that ever sent a man to jail. It answered the suit with the public charge that Henley was incapable. Because he stood up for the rights that producers consider to be so sacred when conditions are reversed, Warners made a dirty and cowardly attempt to ruin the director's reputation.

But Henley stood pat. He, too, held that a contract was sacred. He fought not only for his own rights, but for the rights of all others who had contracts with any of the producing organizations. Finding that its blackmail tactics availed nothing, and having nothing else to fight with, Warners bowed to the inevitable. It paid Henley the money he demanded and made a sickening exhibition of itself in eating publicly its blackmailing utterances. It was not a handsome and generous gesture on its part, an honest attempt to right a wrong. The truth was forced out of its snarling jaws. Read this letter, written to Hobart Henley and signed for Warner Brothers by Darryl Zanuck:

> We wish to withdraw and retract any and all statements made by us in the heat of the recent controversy between us regarding your qualifications, standing and abilities as a director. We wish to assure you that we consider you to be an extremely capable, conscientious and able motion picture director, and to assure you further that the services you have rendered to us in the past have been in all respects eminently satisfactory.

A spectacle that the motion picture industry has no reason for pointing to with pride! In going through with it, Henley performed a distinct service to all those under contract to studios. I emphatically condemn Barbara Stanwyck for the violation of her contract with Columbia, but at least she did not attempt to blackmail Harry Cohn into acceptance of her terms.

The Way to Find Out

WE WERE LOOKING at rushes. The head of production was on his way to his projection room when he bumped into me, and he took me with him. "There's action for you!" he boasted, when a long scene ended and the lights came up. "You're always clamoring for more motion. Well, how did you like that?" The scene showed three men in an office, putting over the story entirely in dialogue, and what my friend boasted about was their activity in moving about the room while they were talking.

"You simple-minded ass," I said, not wishing to be insulting by using impolite language, "that's not motion. If you'll let me give some instruction to the man in the projection booth, I'll show you what I have in mind when I do my clamoring."

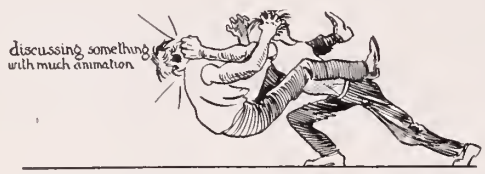
I went into the booth, conferred with the projectionist, and returned to my seat. The next two scenes were run without the sound track. The first was a long dialogue scene between the male and female leads who had a tea-table between them. By constant fiddling with the tea things they imparted much physical animation to their conversation, but we could not get the faintest idea of what they were talking about. The motion did not advance the story in any way, consequently it was not filmic motion. The experiment was suggested to me by Slavko Vorkapich, associate director of *Girls About Town*, a Paramount picture, who told me one day that the only way to determine the amount of real motion in a picture was to run it without the sound track.

▼▼ THE NEXT SCENE showed two men walking along a country road. They were discussing something with much animation. Again what we saw told us nothing.

Vorkapich's suggestion is a good one. Filmic motion is motion that has story value, that will mean something if run

without sound. Of course we always will have a certain amount of dialogue that carries the story, but pictures will be successful at the box-office to the extent that the camera is used as the story-telling medium, for the present slump in picture attendance is the definite expression of the public's refusal to accept screen entertainment that relies wholly upon dialogue to make itself understandable. Every producer tells me that he appreciates that his pictures must contain more action, but I have not discovered one who knows what action means in a filmic sense.

The one way for producers to find out if their directors are succeeding in putting into their pictures more motion that has real box-office value, is for them to run the completed pictures



with the sound eliminated. To the extent that the silent reels mean something to them are the directors making progress in supplying the one element that must come back to the screen if the industry expects to get out of the red.

"I suppose I have been a simple-minded ass," muttered my producer friend as I put my head into the projection room and thanked the fellow inside.

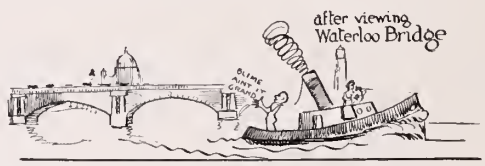
Junior's Whale

JAMES WHALE supervised the photographing of *Journey's End*, the play he had directed for the stage, and by virtue of its being photographed for presentation on the screens of the world, Whale was given the rating of motion picture director. The photographed play was such a success that Paramount gave Whale a salary for six months, but gave him no picture to direct. Then he went to Tiffany, where he stayed nine months working on a story and imploring someone to let him make it into a picture. Finally Whale ran across Carl Laemmle, Jr. and he told the young producing genius of Universal the story that he had been trying to make into a picture at Tiffany. Junior did not like the story, but he liked Whale's way of telling it. Instead of listening to the story, he found himself seeing it on his mental screen, and he deduced from that fact his conviction that Whale could direct a motion picture. It turned out to be another of Junior's good hunches. He had on his hands one of our Bob Sherwood's plays, *Waterloo Bridge*, and although as a play it had not startled the world, Junior was satisfied that it contained something out of which a really fine motion picture could be made. Even at that, it took a lot of nerve to let a new man like Whale attempt to make a picture out of it.

I have seen *Waterloo Bridge*. It is among the really fine pictures of the year. It is an intensely human drama, in which the principal characters are a street-walker and a youth of good breeding and high ideals. Sherwood put into his play some sound psychology, real people and his usual crisp and intelligent dialogue. Benn Levy, in making the adaptation for the screen, carried the story farther afield than it had been carried on the stage, and included sequences showing the home life of the boy. These sequences, while in no way altering Sherwood's story, give it a wider pictorial sweep and a more intimate human appeal. Hereafter Whale really can call himself a motion picture director, as he makes *Waterloo Bridge* as much a motion picture as a talkie can be, and wipes out with the camera nearly all traces of its origin. He composes his scenes with regard to both their visual appeal and dramatic significance. He derives from all members of his cast performances that in no way suggest the stage to which his previous experience has been confined. After viewing *Waterloo Bridge* I have no hesitation in saying that this talented Englishman will give us a lot more worthy pictures if he be given the opportunities that his ability entitles him to.

▼▼ THERE ARE TWO performances in *Waterloo Bridge* that will satisfy the most exacting motion picture patrons. Mae Clarke and Kent Douglass are two extremely young people whose right to be considered talented screen artists will be recognized when this picture gets around the country. The two are brought together during an excellently staged air raid on London. They meet on Waterloo Bridge, and the first thing they do is to search for potatoes dropped by an old woman, a human and amusing touch that we could expect to come from the fertile brain of my colleague, Bob. Her association with the boy brings out the latent fine qualities in the character of the street-walker. But to the credit of Sherwood in the first place and to Junior Laemmle in the second place, is the fact that the girl until the very end considers herself unworthy to marry such a fine young man. Under the able direction of Whale both the young people give admirable performances.

Mae Clarke almost succumbed to the cumulative effect of several impossible roles. In each of her infrequent screen appearances, however, there was a quality that suggested that if she ever got a chance she would show us something worthwhile. In *Waterloo Bridge* she was given that chance and she came through with flying colors. The role has everything.



It calls upon her to be tough, tender, romantic, emotional and dramatic; and in each phase of her characterization she is splendid. Kent Douglass, who I understand has gone back to his real name of Douglas Montgomery, is a youth whom Hollywood should not permit to return to the stage as he threatens to do. He has an easy, natural way of conducting himself before the camera, and he reads his lines with a crispness and clarity that make him pleasant to listen to. He has a clean, boyish quality that should endear him to the feminine picture patrons of all ages.

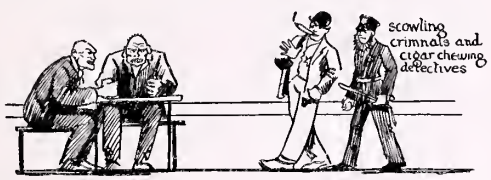
▼▼ ONE OF THE tenderest things we have had on the screen for a long time is the scene between Mae Clarke and Enid Bennett. Miss Bennett plays the understanding and kindly mother of the boy, to whose marriage to the unknown girl she is opposed. "I could marry him if I wanted to," the girl says to the mother, "but I picked him up on Waterloo Bridge.

That is the kind of a girl I am." There was a lump in my throat as I watched each scene in which Mae and Miss Bennett appeared. All of them were done beautifully.

Ethel Griffies gives a splendid performance in a character part, and Frederick Kerr contributes some comedy touches that really have no place in the story, but which are handled so skilfully that they do not interrupt it. Doris Lloyd and Bette Davis add some nice touches, Rita Carlisle is delightful as the old woman who loses her potatoes. Some effective camera work by Arthur Edeson is a feature of the production.

Missed Opportunities

THE ONLY PEOPLE who are as foolish as those who say that the gangster phase in screen entertainment is over, are those who say it is not over. There never was a gangster phase sufficiently definite of itself to make such pictures popular. Depicting the life and habits of the quaint animals who shoot up one another, means virile action on the screen, and



the public is always looking for action. Eliminating from consideration its moral aspect, gangster activity is ideal screen material. Machine guns blazing out of speeding automobiles, police cars careening through crowded streets, scowling criminals plotting to outwit the police, and cigar-chewing detectives doing the outwitting that triumphs in the end, always can be counted upon to entertain audiences if ordinary picture intelligence is displayed in their presentation. Gangster pictures will last as long as Hollywood's ability to make them interesting continues to function.

The Star Witness is proving a success, not because it deals with gangsters, but because it is a moving picture that moves in a physical way and because it makes a strong bid for the sympathy of our emotional complex. Patriotism, mother-love, family loyalty and physical action are ingredients of sure-fire screen material. Handled with the skill that William A. Wellman reveals in its direction, *Star Witness* could not escape being a box-office success.

▼▼ MORE THAN any other gangster picture we have had, it stresses the human note with a persistency that never allows our interest to waver. Frances Starr, as the mother of the distressed family that unwittingly becomes the victim of the persecution of gangsters, makes the greatest appeal to our hearts with a performance that is admirable. Chic Sale's characterization of the Civil War veteran is a cinematic masterpiece, and Walter Huston makes the district attorney a convincing and impressive official. Russell Hopton, Sally Blane, Edward Nugent, and several others also must be credited with adequate performances.

Lucien Hubbard had a great idea for his story and embellished it skilfully up to the trial sequence. There the story falls down and robs the picture of what could have been a really great scene. When Chic Sale makes his dramatic appearance in court I expected to see him take the stand and with full regard for the dignity of court procedure, make an impassioned plea for the brand of Americanism to which he already had alluded several times, and at the same time contribute dramatic strength to his identification of Ralph Ince as the murderous gangster. Instead, Chic wanders around with his hat on, makes a few short speeches, and the whole thing is over. Wellman has succeeded in building the drama up to a point that would have made Sale's appearance on the stand perhaps the biggest thing we ever had in a trial sequence. It is too bad that the picture did not realize all its possibilities. Perhaps Darryl Zanuck had contracted mental indigestion from eating all the cruel words he had uttered about Hobart Henley's ability as a director.

Thrills from Borneo

YOU SEE A tiger jump out of a tree and land on a native and you see the struggle on the ground between the man and the animal, and you hear the excited cries of the natives who come to their comrade's rescue. You see a python, apparently about a mile long and as big around as a beer barrel, crawl across the bare stomach of a terrified native. You see a man trying to out-swim a flock of crocodiles and being dragged under the water by them. You see another huge snake weave its way into a tent and cast its shadow on the sleeping form of Rose Hobart. You see a volcano erupt and its river of lava engulf a native village. You see monkeys, more snakes, countless crocodiles—well, I won't go on. That ought to be enough to whet your appetite for *East of Borneo*, a picture directed by George Melford for Universal.

If you can take your eyes from the screen for one moment while you are viewing *East of Borneo*, you can do something that I found it impossible to do. Of course I know that even though there is a surplus of actors in Hollywood, they're not beginning to thin out the ranks by throwing any of them to the crocodiles; and I think that even in Borneo it would be a hard job to get a native who would allow a tiger to pounce on him, and I am glad I don't know how they make it appear on the screen as if these things actually happened. And I am dubious about that snake slithering across the native's stomach.

Another thing that I am aware of is that Rose Hobart, Charles Bickford and Georges Renavent did not go to Borneo, even though I saw them right there in the middle of one of its densest jungles. And Junior Laemmle or George Melford needn't think that I believed that Charlie Bickford picked up Rose Hobart and waded with her through a bevy of snapping crocodiles. True, I saw him do it, but I knew he didn't do it. Perhaps you know how all these things are done, how things that can't happen are made to happen right before your eyes when you sit in front of a screen. But if you do, you are not going to get half the kick out of this picture that I got out of it. It is all very mystifying, extremely entertaining and tremendously thrilling.

▼▼ EAST OF BORNEO is a compact little picture. It does not show us the wide terrains that the *Trader Horn* cameras brought back, but it gives a more intimate view of everything than we were permitted to have in the Metro picture. The whole thing is an accomplishment of which Universal has a right to be proud, and is up to the high standard that Junior Laemmle is achieving in all his product. I miss my guess if it does not prove to be a tremendous box-office success.

There is a story in *East of Borneo*, but it moves through the scenery about as slowly and deliberately as the snake journeys across the stomach. Because Rose Hobart, wife of Bickford, had an affair with *Harry*, whose acquaintance we do not make, Charlie goes to a Borneo jungle and tries to drink himself to death while acting as court doctor of a rajah, played by Renavent. Rose seeks him out, and her journey up the river is an excuse for showing us a long stretch of remarkable country full of wild animals and other exciting things that were photographed admirably by George Robinson. There is enough story to give the three principals opportunities to do some effective acting. Perhaps it is just as well that it drags in places. We need some rest between the thrills. The volcano eruption, which comes at the end of the picture, is a triumph for the Universal technical department.

▼▼ UNIVERSAL IS displaying honesty in its exploitation of *East of Borneo*. It acknowledges that much of it was shot at Universal City, but as you view the picture if you can tell where Borneo ends and Universal City begins, you know more about the technical end of the business than I do. I am content with the fact that the picture interested me tremendously. I think it will interest you.

The credit for the complicated trick work in *East of Borneo* and which contributed so largely to its entertainment value, goes to John B. Fulton, a talented cameraman with a knack for attending to the mechanical end of cinematic thrills. The spectacle of the spouting volcano and the flow of lava certainly is a credit to his genius.

Repeated Joys

WHEN WE TOOK our seat in the neighborhood house, to which we go quite often now, *Sporting Blood* was about half through. We came upon it when Madge Evans was having her first talk with Ernest Torrence, and from there we followed it joyously to the end, thrilled at times by the things in it that thrill, and always in the grip of the deep feeling that underlies it. We sat through everything to wait for the beginning, and when we came to the place that we had seen already we continued to sit until the end was reached again. That was how *Sporting Blood* appealed to me and to the patient soul who hunts pictures with me. It is excellent screen entertainment because it appeals to everyone who loves that noble animal, the horse, who has a drop of sporting blood in his veins, and who can react emotionally to the emotional appeal that comes from the screen. It has its attraction also for him who loves beauty on the screen, and who has a taste for effective composition and an appreciation of superb photography.

But there is an appeal in *Sporting Blood* greater than all those that I have mentioned. It is the fact that the story is told almost entirely with the camera. True it is filled with dialogue, but always in the background we have the spirit and the movement of the story. The races in which *Tommy Boy* competes are brought to us only by the camera. We are introduced to a new locale, again something for which the camera is responsible. Any picture that gives us as much to look at as this one does, that has a story with even small merit and presents us with such excellent performances as we find in this one, can not escape being a box-office success. It is visual entertainment that the public wants and here we have it.

▼▼ I WOULD DIVIDE the chief acting honors about equally between Ernest Torrence and Madge Evans. The former never did better work on the screen. Madge Evans is climbing rapidly up my list of favorite screen girls. Her part in this picture has deep emotional appeal, and in all her scenes with *Tommy Boy* she is so sweet and gentle that she brought to my consciousness that I had a lump in my throat. I am partial to girls who bring both beauty and talent to bear on my senses, and I love animals of all sorts, consequently when the two are brought together my cup of enjoyment is filled to the brim. I liked Clark Gable's performance in *Sporting Blood*. He certainly is an excellent actor. I can't quite understand why the women are so batty about him, for I don't think they altogether base their admiration upon his acting skill, but as the skill is great enough to satisfy me, I don't quarrel with the women who are being effected by any other charms he may possess. Several of the colored people contribute excellent performances and all the minor parts are well taken.

Charles Brabin did a masterly bit of work in his direction of this picture. He must be a lover of horses, for he gives his picture great sentimental appeal to all those who have a warm spot in their hearts for them. He shares with the scenario writer credit for building up the drama of the races until they become tremendous thrills. Both times that I saw *Tommy Boy* win the Kentucky Derby I was stirred tremendously. It will be a long time before I outlive the pleasure that *Sporting Blood* gave me.

Why They Flop

UP NEARER THE front of this *Spectator* you may have read a short article about there being four flops among talkies to one there used to be among silents. After writing it, and with the thought still uppermost in my mind, I went to a neighborhood house to see Richard Dix in *Public Defender*, which reports indicated was creating no furore at the box-offices of the country. I had read no favorable reviews of it, but I found it quite interesting. The story held my attention and it has to its credit several creditable performances, but still it is just another talkie. If the same story had been made into a picture in the silent days, it would have been engrossing screen entertainment. It is an ideal story for silent treatment. As a talkie its cinematic values were sacrificed to the microphone.

I believe that all the weaknesses that contributed to the comparative box-office failure of this picture could have been in a silent picture without lessening to an appreciable degree its entertainment value. A talkie is more of a fact and less of a phantasy than a silent picture used to be. The talkie challenges our critical faculty and we allow it no liberties. For instance, when Richard Dix announces dramatically that he will turn into the driveway at precisely seven twenty-eight, and when it appears later that it could not make any difference to anyone or anything just when he turns in, we notice it and criticise the picture for it. No doubt in the silent days there were even more such things in pictures, but we did not notice them. I am convinced that somewhere hidden in this thought is the reason for four flops now to one we used to have.

▼▼ IN ANY PICTURE, talkie or silent, I think we would notice the strange behavior of a girl who enjoys herself in a gay cafe right after her father had been indicted for embezzlement; who seems to be quite indifferent to losing her beautiful home, and who inflicts upon herself the torture caused by her entirely unnecessary attendance at the sale by auction of her family's possessions. And violent reactions to the ringing of a door-bell are things we condemned in that happy time when we couldn't hear the bell ringing. In any picture I am sure we would note the fact that a syphon of soda and a decanter of whisky are standing on a taboret placed directly in front of a hot fire in a grate. Of course, Dix and his guests may have liked their whiskies and sodas warm—which is truly a nauseating thought.

However, there are a lot of things in *Public Defender* which I liked. Dix's performance is one of them. He is a manly looking chap, possessed of a good voice, and is an excellent actor. Shirley Grey, his leading woman, gives a performance that savors too much of the stage. The picture has a large cast, and both big and little bits are done excellently. As is the case with all Radio productions, this one contains some of Max Rée's sets which are appropriate to the story and preserve its mood. J. Walter Ruben directed rather conventionally, but he is young at the job, and there is enough in this one to indicate that there is hope for him.

For the Sake of Joan

JOAN BENNETT, both in person and on the screen, is one of my favorites. Because she is having a tough time of it following her serious accident, I felt it was up to me to do homage to our friendship by seeing her in *Hush Money* which critics agreed was pretty poor, the composite opinion being the reason for my avoidance of it until it was on the point of disappearing from the neighborhood houses. As has been the case with so many pictures, I find myself disagreeing with the reviewers about this one. It was one of the most satisfactory screen offerings I have seen recently. I started out in a spirit of sacrifice, steeled to endure something for the sake of suffering Joan, and had a darned good time.

I liked everything that *Hush Money* has to offer with the single exception of the affected manner of speech that Owen Moore has picked up somewhere. I don't think Joan ever gave a more appealing performance, and certainly never before has she looked better on the screen. Her career in pictures has not been meteoric, but she has progressed steadily and she has earned the kind of popularity that will last. In *Hush Money* she is called upon to depict a wide variety of emotions and always is equal to the demands made upon her. Hardie Albright, who plays opposite her, has a pleasant personality and handles his rather conventional part acceptably.

▼▼ C. Henry Gordon gives another of the splendid performances he has contributed to pictures. I have seen him in quite a range of characterizations and each time I have been impressed anew with his finished technic and his deep understanding of the parts he plays. There is an actor in this picture whom I never saw before, Douglas Cosgrove, who plays a captain of detectives. A great deal of the enjoyment the film gave me is attributable to Cosgrove's fine, human and easy performance.

Sidney Lanfield directed *Hush Money*. I think this is the first time I have reviewed a picture to which his name was attached. If it is his initial adventure he has done a notable job in turning out a production that would do justice to a man long in the business. One of his many clever touches made a special impression upon me. In a prison sequence which gave us glimpses of Joan serving a sentence, Lanfield kept his camera outside the cells, always keeping the bars between the audience and the characters, thus heightening the impression that a criminal is something apart from the rest of us.

It's Quite All Right

During his short sojourn at Universal on his flight from a subordinate position at Columbia to the biggest position at Tiffany, Sam Bischoff made a little picture for Carl Laemmle. It was a small affair and not a great deal of attention was paid to it on the lot. Carl Laemmle, Jr. saw that in a general way *Homicide Squad* conformed to his production standard, and then let Sam go ahead. I don't think the budget was excessively generous and I would not be surprised if the shooting schedule was somewhat cramped. Junior is to be congratulated upon his wisdom in allowing Sam to go ahead.

Homicide Squad is one of the most engrossing pictures that I have seen. It is another gangster offering and makes no concession to the bigger ones that have gone before. George Melford directed and deserves only the warmest praise for the skilful manner in which he blended all his elements to produce such a thoroughly satisfying bit of screen entertainment. After the picture was previewed, several added scenes were shot under the direction of Edward Cahn, as Melford by that time was busy on another picture. To Cahn's credit it can be said that although it was his first attempt at directing, his work measures up with that of the veteran Melford, because I could see nothing on the screen to indicate that two men had had a hand in the making of the picture.

▼▼ The story of *Homicide Squad* is surprisingly good considering that the original was written by Henry La Cossitt, the adaptation made by Charles Logue and the dialogue continuity was written by John Thomas Neville. I do not mean that it is surprising that these men as individuals turned out a good job. What surprises me is that any three men could turn out a good motion picture story. Anyway, we have the trio to thank for two good murders, a nice little romance and a great deal of action. I think it is Junior Laemmle whom we have to thank for the absence of comedy relief from this engrossing and dramatic picture. It sticks to its job of being a drama and no effort is made to divert our attention from the drama and to some silly ass who tries to make us laugh.

Homicide Squad abounds in really excellent performances. Leo Carrillo plays the chief gangster. He gives a consistent, thoughtful and sinister portrayal of a cold-blooded murderer who laughs while he kills. Noah Beery makes a forceful captain of detectives. Russell Gleason was to me the surprise of the cast. I always have liked his performances, but I never had seen him do anything that prepared me for the outstanding performance he gives in this picture. He plays a rather colorless youth who, apparently against his wishes, has become involved with one of the gangs. And he adds to his characterization understanding and skill that a veteran actor might envy. A few more performances like this one will give young Gleason definite rating among our real dramatic actors. Sharing a romance with him is the delightful Mary Brian, who never fails to give a good performance. Some splendid acting is done by J. Carrol Naish as a double-crossing gangster. He makes intensely dramatic a scene in which he pleads

for his life after his associates have put him on the spot. It is one of the best bits of acting we have had lately. Walter C. Percival and George Brent do their share towards holding up the acting average of the picture.

You can put *Homicide Squad* down as another Universal success. Unless gangster pictures are on your list of inhibitions, you will have a good time if you view this one.

Pretty Bad

MANY PEOPLE who had seen her two previous appearances on the screen, had expressed to me their opinion that Elissa Landi was a splendid actress, had an arresting personality and was destined to become as great a favorite as either Marlene Dietrich or Greta Garbo. I missed her first pictures, but hastened to avail myself of the invitation from Fox to view her latest, *Wicked*, directed by Alan Dwan, and featuring Victor McLaglen, who plays opposite the star. It is perhaps the stupidest picture I ever saw. It is artificial, illogical and unconvincing. It has a complete and expensive production and a splendid cast, but there is not one moment in which it has any appeal.

Miss Landi's husband, Theodor von Eltz, is wanted by the police for robbery and murder; the wife, a clean and decent woman who is astounded by the revelation of her husband's plight, accidentally shoots a policeman; she is sent to jail; she has a baby; the baby is taken from her; she kidnaps it, and makes an impassioned plea for it, and at no time during the running of the picture did I care a hang if she ever saw the baby again or ever got out of jail. The successful picture is the one that makes the audience want to see done the things that ultimately are done. The only thing this one will make you want to see is the fade-out. There is enough grief to saturate a theatre with the tears of its audience, but the grief is not handled in a manner that will provoke the tears.

▼▼ IN THE SAME projection room I cried with Jimmy Dunn whose only tragedy was his inability to pay the fee of a big physician; but I yawned when Elissa Landi went to jail and when her baby was taken from her. And far be it from me to suggest that those who predict great things for her are wrong. It is not her fault that she did not make me cry. No one could have wrenched tears out of material so artificial and situations so uninteresting. To bolster up what probably was considered to be the greatest scene of the picture, there is an outburst of music to give it dramatic emphasis, but all that is accomplished is an exhibition of how not to use music in a motion picture. What little chance the star had to make the scene impressive was ruined by the unexpected outburst so palpably inserted for the sole purpose of drawing attention to what a swell scene it was.

Fox may have a real asset in Miss Landi. I have no way

of knowing. I do know, however, that she can not be great enough to stand any more pictures like *Wicked*. Nor will it do any good to Vic McLaglen. I actually felt sorry for the big fellow as I watched him go through his scenes. Most of the time he must have been wondering what the devil it was all about. It was the same with Una Merkel. This talented young woman was handed a part entirely devoid of values of any sort.

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▼▼ SHE ENTERED by the rear gate, came along the side of the house, and broke in on me while I was busy in my chair on the front porch writing wise and weighty things for *Spectator* readers. I never had seen her before. "I will tell your fortune for fifty cents," she said. "You won't," I replied. "I've told the fortunes of hundreds of picture people," she offered pugnaciously. "I don't care; you'll not tell mine," I announced again. "I go to parties and tell the fortunes of all the people present," she said. I returned to my writing. She fidgetted for a while. "You don't want your fortune told?" "I do not!" Another pause. "Well, then, will you buy some figs?" So I bought some figs. I've been sitting here, looking at the breakers, watching the sandpipers, and wondering if her whole idea in the first place was to sell me some figs.

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▼▼ MY CONCEPTION of Carman Barnes was a plain-looking girl who had attained a certain flair among muddy-minded people by writing a couple of smutty books. I was not interested in her. The other day I opened a book at random and began to read. I was struck at once with the beauty of the language, the skill with which the sentences were woven, and the literary excellence that characterized each paragraph. I turned to the cover and found that I was reading *Beau Lover*, by Carman Barnes. I read another page or two. I don't know what the story is about, and perhaps I would have been disgusted if I had continued to read, but I went far enough to convince myself of one thing: The child certainly can write.

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▼▼ A FEW WEEKS ago I viewed the silent classic, *Way Down East*, dressed up with its synchronized score. I was impressed again with the eloquence of the silent language in which the screen used to express itself. The old-time airs that came from the screen employed my aural sense pleasantly and almost sub-consciously while I followed visually the progress of the story across the screen. The restfulness of it was refreshing. The picture lacks nothing because it is silent. No amount of dialogue could make clearer the meaning of any of its scenes. There is nothing surer than that someday we will have silent pictures again. The silent screen is an art too great to be destroyed by any mechanical device.

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▼▼ EDWIN SCHALLERT asks in the *Los Angeles Times* where the screen comedians of the future are to come from. They're going to come from the writers of comedies. The present low state of film comedies is due to the fool notion of producers that only comedians can be funny on the screen. A properly conceived and written comedy scene is one that would be funny if played straight. It is the only sound comedy construction. When we develop comedy writers, we find that we are developing a number of players who will become identified with them, and these players will be called comedians. They will make us laugh, however, because they are good actors, not because they are comedians.

▼ ▼

▼▼ VICKI BAUM has gone away without leaving anything behind to repay Paramount for all the money it cost to bring her out here to write stories for it. You may recall that when the noted European novelist arrived in Hollywood I predicted that the net result to Paramount would be a story written by someone else which would appear on the screen as "By Vicki Baum." It seems that Paramount didn't get even that much. But that won't deter it in the future from paying huge sums to other writers who know nothing about screen requirements. That is why it is necessary for it to reduce the salaries of the writers it employs regularly.

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▼▼ DURING THE past summer there have been several freak rains in Los Angeles. One of them happened whenever Bill Conselman had his car washed. On one occasion he even had a personal shower, which covered only about as much area as his car does, and which went all the way home with him. He is thinking of touring the State and bringing relief to arid regions. If they need a shower he will have his car washed. To produce a downpour he will have it washed and polished, and when a cloudburst is required he will have it simonized. Bill thinks that if he could get the chambers of commerce interested there would be a lot of money in the idea.

▼ ▼

▼▼ A MOTION PICTURE should be what its name implies—a *motion* picture, one that moves smoothly across the screen with either pictorial or emotional progression. In the opening sequences, when the story is being set, the scenes can be episodic, but when the characters have been introduced and identified and the premise established, each scene should advance the story in a straight line. It is the visual flow, not the inherent strength of the story, that determines the drawing power of the picture—not the story itself, but the manner in which it is told in motion picture language.

▼ ▼

▼▼ DEAR DOUG: The *New York Times* states that in suggesting the name of your travel picture—*Around the World with Douglas Fairbanks*—I won a tiger skin. I know that I

suggested the name you adopted, but do you know anything about the tiger skin? And if you offered a prize, don't you think as befitting my years, home life and staid habits, you could dig up something less passionate than a tiger skin?—W. B.

▼ ▼

▼▼ IN HIS WEEKLY coast-to-coast radio broadcasting, Francis X. Bushman is talking his way back into the ranks of box-office film personages. Reports are to the effect that his air appearances are proving immensely popular all over this country and Canada. Frank certainly makes himself interesting and has, as always, a marvelous voice. Producers should give him a thought when they have parts that suit him.

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▼▼ INVADING FOR a moment the domain of the chatter writer: Billie Dove writes verse, some of it witty, some of it satirical, and much of it both thoughtful and beautiful. She paints in oils, some of her dogs' heads being remarkable studies. She is a clever sculptress. She flies her own plane. And she is a terrible indoor baseball player.

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▼▼ IN MY REVIEW of *The Black Camel*, which appeared in a *Spectator* some weeks ago, I referred to an excellent performance given by a man who played the part of a beach-combing artist. At that time I did not know his name. I discovered that it is Murray Kinnell. Mr. Kinnell is a talented actor.

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▼▼ SOME PARAMOUNT pictures that I have seen recently presented the casts both at the beginning and end of the film. This is a good practice. All of us innumerable times have had our curiosity regarding the identity of a new player aroused by an interesting performance. Running the cast at the end of the picture will satisfy our curiosity.

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▼▼ BURON FITTS, district attorney of Los Angeles county, is dependable. No matter what course may be dictated by the demands of justice or good taste, we always can count upon his handling each case in a manner that will bring him the greatest amount of personal publicity.

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▼▼ I WOULDN'T bet a great deal on the permanency of the Clark Gable boom. It came too suddenly from nowhere. It has reached such a feverish state in Hollywood that it is inevitable that it soon will burn itself out.

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▼▼ A RADIO ANNOUNCER in one of the race track sequences in *Sporting Blood*, tells us that in the great throng at the races are "people from the four corners of the seven seas." Scarcely enough corners to go around.

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▼▼ THE SIR HUBERT Wilkins invasion of the Esquimos, sponsored by W. R. Hearst, strikes me as being the greatest fool thing of all history.

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▼▼ I CAN'T see how anyone can eat custard.

Films and Education

(Dr. Walter Gunther in The International Review of Educational Cinematography)

As soon as we begin to believe that external aids, like films and photographs, make us richer, see more, know more, give us a view of the universe, when we cease to regard *ourselves* as the raw material, cease to test and control, and accept pictures as convenient realities instead of signposts on the road Truth, then it is time to abolish them from our schools and educational institutions. And if we teachers employ films and photographs as ends in themselves, we in our turn should be abolished.

And yet there is no more wonderful means—a means, be it noted—of capturing the whole world, revealing its splendors to our schools and persuading them to absorb its contents than pictures and films—provided, that is, that we remain the masters, and do not become the slaves, of our medium.

▼ ▼

Crime Influence Exaggerated

(Report of Royal Commission Upon the Film Industry, Australia)

In Victoria the opinion of Dr. Chas. Player, who has been associated with the Children's Court for seventeen years was that after a careful study he had come to the conclusion that the evil effects of the film upon children had been very much exaggerated and that the number of cases in which crime may be attributable directly to the film is negligible . . . In South Australia and in West Australia, a very small percentage of juvenile crime could be traced directly to cinemas.

Hail! Hail! the Gang's Always Here

By R. E. Sherwood

The benevolent attempt to promote a campaign of anti-gangster propaganda on the screen will come to nothing, because the public simply won't stand for it. (And don't say that I'm just an unconscionable old cynic, because I'm not. I'm as eager to believe the best as though I were a character impersonated by Janet Gaynor.)

Not long ago, in New York, there was a supposed outburst of indignation as a result of a gang battle in the course of which several innocent bystanders, including children, were killed. A monster mass-meeting of protest in Madison Square Garden was organized by the Hearst newspapers (which, incidentally, would be in a sorry way were it not for the continued abundance of the crime crop). The police were urged to declare war on all the minions of the underworld—to drive every gun-man and every moll beyond the moist boundaries of Manhattan. That successful patriot, George M. Cohan, composer of *Over There*, wrote a new march song which ended with these stirring words:

"Scram! Scram! Scram! says Uncle Sam—
Mr. Racketeer—Good-bye!"

Seldom has such a tidal wave of virtuousness swept across this celebrated sink of iniquity. It seemed for a while that all the vile boot-leggers and hi-jackers would be forced to go as far away from New York City as is (usually) its Mayor.

Suddenly, however, the reform wave receded. Public indignation dropped from the boiling point to zero. And the reason for this abrupt change was as follows: The police had been too active. By dint of intimidation and cajolery, they had compelled the criminals to lay low for a while and suspend their normal activities. With the result that very few trucks laden with illicit cargoes crossed the bridges, warehouses were closely watched, and thousands of the best boot-leggers dashed off to the mountains or the beach for a much-needed rest.

The price of liquor went up—which caused the public to squawk a lot more vehemently than it squawked at the outbursts of gang warfare.

▼▼ The attitude of the American people towards gangsters may be stated, roughly but correctly, in these words:

"We know they're a pack of undesirables. We know that they constitute a menace. We know that they're murderers, lawless, anti-social and all the other things that they're called in sermons and editorials. *But the fact remains that they're the boys who deliver the beer!*

"Racketeering is certainly an evil. But as long as the present situation continues, it's a necessary one."

In this connection, I remember a highly moral moving picture that I saw a few years ago, in which the hero was a state trooper and the villains a group of rum-runners. He was trying to thwart their attempts to smuggle several hundred cases of Scotch across the Canadian border. The hero was very noble and indomitably brave—but the picture went wrong, because, in the big, final chase sequence, the audience cheered for the wrong side. They bitterly resented the trooper's dutiful efforts to prevent the hooch from reaching its destination.

▼▼ There is another factor in the public's attitude, and it is even more important than the unquenchable demands of our national nervous-system for the solace of alcohol.

It is absolutely impossible to draw a line between the acknowledged racketeers and the unquestionably honest persons. For in virtually every one of us is the ancient impulse to put the other guy on the spot. A love of lawlessness, a persistent inclination to revolt against all arbitrary manifestations of authority, are deeply rooted in the American character.

We speak reverentially of our forefathers, the founders of our nation. In the early colonies, in Georgia and Virginia, our ancestors were for the most part unscrupulous criminals of whom the Mother Country was glad to see the last. In the southwest, they were the most unruly adventurers that Spain could produce. Even in New England they were people who, however saintly, were violent rebels against the forces of law and order in their native land. Their shocking behavior at the Boston Tea Party was not so very different from that of the modern reputable citizen who can see no reason why he should not violate the law by purchasing a bottle of Chateau Uquem.

It is an ancient American tradition that as long as the law is no respecter of persons, then persons have a right to reciprocate by being no respecters of the law. That tradition has colored our entire national life. It has given us our chief claim to individuality as a separate, unique race.

▼▼ You probably read of the delightful episode at the Harmsworth Cup Races, when Gar Wood deliberately beat the gun in the attempt to lead Kaye Don, the Britisher, into disqualifying himself and possibly killing himself.

The American press, to its credit, loudly deplored this demonstration of double-dealing. The *New York Herald-Tribune* was particularly wrathful in its editorial comment; but one of its readers, who signed himself "A. Mick", wrote to it in disagreement. I beg leave to quote his letter:

"An editorial this morning says that the action of Gar Wood did violence to the American conception of sportsmanship. Sorry, I can not agree with you. His action was typically American and thoroughly in accord with American practice not only in sport but also in other lines of human endeavor.

"You must remember that the standard of the business man rather than that of the gentleman rules in this country. Any trick goes, no matter how low or dirty, provided it gives one an advantage over an opponent. If it succeeds you are a smart fellow and worthy of admiration. It is this spirit that makes for the crookedness and corruption found in all walks of life here today. It is responsible for crooked politicians, judges, lawyers, police and the horde of gangsters that afflict us.

"The same spirit caused the American runners in a cer-

tain race at the Olympic games to conspire to jockey the lone English runner out of his chance of winning, and causes so many of our colleges, supposed to be the fountain-heads of pure sport, to hire professional football players to play on their teams, under the guise of bona-fide students, so that they may overcome certain rivals and boast of a winning team.

"No, sir; notwithstanding your editorial, which is to be commended, I am of the opinion that the vast majority of the American people approve of Gar Wood's action and regard him as a true nephew of Uncle Sam."

I don't know who "A Mick" is, but it seems to me that he has uttered several lamentably important truths.

▼▼ WE HAVE DEVELOPED in the United States of America a new national religion, which may be called Success-Worship. In the pursuit of Success, anything goes—just as, in the Middle Ages, the most appalling corruption and unspeakable brutality were condoned because they were perpetrated by the Church in the name of God. Probably the most dreadful thing that has ever happened on earth—the Children's Crusade—was inspired by Faith, and therefore justifiable.

Examine the careers of some of our current great men, the hallowed John D. Rockefeller, for instance, or that other benevolent philanthropist, the late George F. Baker, and you will find that their rises to positions of wealth and eminence were accomplished by the usage of methods not ethically different from Al Capone's. After all, to ruin a competitor, to drive him to despair and possibly to suicide, is not appreciably more decent and Christian than to have him discreetly bumped off.

We can not bring ourselves to despise the gangsters, who are at least relatively free from the taint of hypocrisy. For as long as we can believe, like Gar Wood and like many high officials in our government, that anything goes in the name of success, then we are ourselves gangsters at heart.

If George M. Cohan wishes to write another timely song, he might well paraphrase the national anthem:

"Bombs bursting in air,
And the rackets' red glare,
Give proof through the night
That the flag is still there."

▼▼ NOT THAT ALL of the foregoing has much to do with the present state of the motion picture industry—except in so far as it expresses the hope that the producers will not continue to be cowed by the censors who, because they are political appointees and therefore in cahoots with the worst of the racketeering grafters, are reluctant to have the truth told on the screen.

Flesh and Blood

▼▼ WHEN I STARTED contributing to the *Hollywood Spectator*, Mr. Beaton announced that I would keep the readers advised as to what is going on of importance in the New York theatres.

Unfortunately, I find it difficult to keep up with this promise. For whenever I look about Broadway I see very little of importance going on, though there is a great deal coming off.

I have seen two shows—*The Band-Wagon* and the *Ziegfeld Follies*—and revelled in both of them. Neither one of them, however, can now be classed as news. Their song-hits have already been done to death on the Embassy Roof, and at the Ambassador and George Olsen's, and most of their gags have been appropriated by the Brown Derby wits (and credited to Wilson Mizner or Arthur Caesar.)

The Band Wagon originated, as did the first *Little Show* and *Three's a Crowd*, in the nimble brain of Howard Dietz, who is and long has been the head of the advertising and publicity department of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. One would think that M-G-M would be able to use this highly gifted young man to better advantage in its studio, but apparently Mr. Dietz scorns the idea of going to Hollywood except for sales conferences.

Strangely enough, in Mr. Dietz's department at M-G-M is another writer who has made a comfortable fortune in his spare time. This is Donald Henderson Clarke, author of such captivating fiction as *Millie*, *Impatient Virgin* and *Young and Healthy*.

Both Mr. Dietz and Mr. Clarke receive vast sums in royalties for their extra-mural activities, but they go right on writing ads for the latest Laurel and Hardy fun-fest.

▼▼ THE BEST COMEDY scene in the *Follies* is, of course, in a bed-room—the nuptial chamber of a great male movie star who has just married his leading lady. Being at a loss to know how to act toward his bride, he calls in his director to give him some advice. The director finds that this love scene presents many difficulties, particularly as he has no script, so he paces up and down the bed-room, tearing his hair and muttering, "What would Lubitsch do?"

As you probably know there is also in the *Follies* a rendition by Miss Ruth Etting of that glorious song, *Shine On Harvest Moon*. She does it superbly, but she gets one of the words wrong—which will be painful news to such careful Hollywood vocalists as Victor Fleming, Mrs. Arthur Rosson, John R. T. Ryan and E. E. Paramore, Jr.

Words of Cheer

▼▼ NOW THAT I am far from the West Coast, and consequently out of ear-shot of the persistent viewers-with-alarm, I may say that from where I sit it appears that picture production is improving at an encouraging rate. Visible about Times Square at this moment are *The Guardsman*, *Five Star Final*, *Street Scene*, *Waterloo Bridge*, *Alexander Hamilton* and *An American Tragedy*—an impressive array in any week or in any year.

Now, if only all you dear people would advertise in the *Hollywood Spectator*, then everything would be lovely.

▼ ▼ ▼

Appeal For Action

(E. D. Keilmann in The Reel Journal)

I do not believe the admission has a thing to do with the present crisis in the talkies, except that for the kind of talkies we are getting the price is too high. Do not believe that a price reduction would bring many more fans to the box-office for the same kind of pictures.

The fans want entertainment and will pay for it if it's what they want. Ask one of the fans what they want and you'll get a stammer or a blank look. They don't know, but if you talk long enough you'll discover this—

The chief appeal of the old silent movies was that they moved. The first and foremost thing in them was a story and that story never stopped going right ahead. The actors told their story with action. There was a rapid change from scene to scene. The old chases were the first thing that attracted attention from the public and a refined progress of the chase was what kept them movie fans.

No man can talk and run, so when the talkies came the actors had to stop acting to talk. The story stopped. The rapid change from scene to scene stopped, everything stopped so that the "new marvel" of talking could be introduced.

Story Value and Direction

By Dalton Trumbo

THE OTHER DAY I was talking with a young lady of fifteen summers. She had just seen *Tabu*. I immediately was interested in her opinion of the Mürnau jewel, because the psychology books in my library inform me that an individual of her age is a very acute judge of entertainment. Inasmuch as the child has staggered through *Madame Bovary* and can swim a mile over a rather choppy course, I thought her opinion of the picture might be revealing. It was. "A nice picture," she admitted reluctantly, "but there wasn't any story."

I was shocked. I tried to tell her how immense was the story which the picture contained. I argued with her about the beauty of photography, the subtlety of direction, the charm of the native actors. All of this she admitted freely, but still and all she couldn't bring herself to say that she enjoyed the picture. Sensing that I followed a hopeless cause I deserted her, and over a pot of black coffee I tried to discover just what this thing we call story amounts to. I think it amounts to a lot. Mr. Beaton thinks it amounts to considerably less than direction. "As raw material," he writes, comparing the story to direction, "as something on paper before shooting begins, the story is not important."

▼▼ THERE IS NO ONE, I think, who would contend that the direction of a play is more important than the manuscript of the play. At once I grant that the direction of a motion picture involves many more complex elements than go into the production of a play. There is lighting, angle, distance —but these, I contend, belong to the technician. There are those bits of atmospheric action, such as the panting dog in *Street Scene* and the overturned fish bowl in *Storm Over Asia*. But I can not understand why a writer of motion pictures could not and should not incorporate such revealing quirks into his script. The director may suggest, may add with permission, but of himself he is nothing more than an interpreter of the story.

Stokowski directing a Beethoven symphony is an imposing and important figure, but there are few who will declare him a more important party to the operation than Beethoven. Paderewski playing the *Second Rhapsody* does not rival Liszt. Only when he interprets one of his own compositions does he rise to the ideal position. The final appearance of a building rests more with the architect than the builder. I have no idea who the contractor for St. Paul's was, but I can hardly escape the significance of Sir Christopher Wren's name. A Chanel gown may be improved or spoiled by seamstresses, but fundamentally the value of the creation is in direct ratio to the genius of the designer.

▼▼ I DO NOT MEAN to disparage the importance of direction in a motion picture. Stupid direction can ruin a picture just as surely as faulty workmanship can ruin a well planned building. Direction with a touch of genius can exalt a picture above the conception of its author even as a talented seamstress can get something quite creditable out of a poor design. But the direction of a project, whether it be a motion picture or a French pastry, is essentially a supplementary art. It is intended to follow a set journal of instruction. By the very nature and logic of things this is so, and I fail to understand why motion pictures are radically different.

The story of *Bad Girl*, continues Mr. Beaton, was "trivial in theme, trivial in characterization and trivial in incident." Yet, he points out, it was made into a splendid and touching motion picture. A great deal of credit undoubtedly goes to Frank Borzage for the accomplishment. And I imagine that more credit than we reviewers are accustomed to dole out should go to Edwin Burke for his continuity and dialogue. And then again, Miss Delmar's story is sure-fire stuff. It concerns a boy and a girl and a baby. The first story of earth, if I am to believe Genesis, dwelt on this subject, and I am willing to wager that the last also will flavor strongly of it. Miss Delmar's book was smeared over with hard-boiled sentimentalism, it was cheap, and at the moment, sensational; but within its covers lay the germ which resulted in the Fox film, and the universality of the story is reflected in the universality of the picture.

▼▼ TRANSATLANTIC Mr. Beaton rightfully characterizes as "an ordinary crook yarn that combined all the threadworn ingredients that have been used a thousand times." Yet it was made into a delightfully smart picture. William K. Howard has been praised extravagantly, but I should like to know just what percentage of the picture's artistic success should be credited to Guy Bolton. How many of those clever touches were written into the script by the author? And finally, I think that *Transatlantic* is a little disappointing at the box-office. It ran only two weeks locally. If this is so, there might be a hint as to the reason in several newspaper reviews which praised it highly, but intimated that it might prove too arty for common consumption. Its artfulness lay in its direction, we are told, and although I thought the picture splendid, still I am wondering.

I frankly sympathize with the writers of Hollywood whose laments are becoming increasingly more noticeable. Half of them, I presume, are hopeless incompetents, even as half of the directors are incompetents. Many of them are big names imported at three figures to loll in the sunshine and impart box-office to any production that bears their names. But there must be a few—say five per cent—who know motion pictures, and who are capable of turning out a script that could be directed by a nitwit, and still be a fairly entertaining picture. They are the ones who will survive if those fates that watch over Hollywood are kind. They will write scripts so minutely that any moderately sensitive director will be able to shoot them without once losing the objective about which the author constructed his tale.

▼▼ NOBODY KNOWS how many first rate scripts have been murdered in the endless rounds of conference. Nobody knows how many writers' souls have writhed after everyone from script girl to director has made revisions. Nobody knows how many times that which was blue in the script turned out to be a sickly purple on the screen. And nobody knows

how great a percentage of the success of really fine pictures should be attributed directly to the script. We are in an age of directors, and so greatly accustomed to them have we become that we have almost forgotten that at best they are merely masters of coördination. The showmanship of Stokowski is mistaken for genius. The piloting of Lindbergh is hailed to high heaven, but nobody knows who constructed his plane. The director is perhaps as necessary as any other element which goes into production, but at the foundation of every creative effort is discovered the stamp of the creator, and the finished product will not vary greatly from the level which the creator has set, save in rare and striking instances. I hold this to be as true in pictures as in shoe making.

The ideal will be approached when the writer also directs his effort. But that, I suspect, will be infrequent. Literary imagination and executive energy rarely are infused in the same man. But I think it beyond question that when the stones in Hollywood's basket adjust themselves, the writers will be on top and in full command of the situation. They will write scripts which outline every movement, every atmospheric shot, every fluctuation of voice and thought. Only by doing this can they preserve the artistic unity of their creation. The director will coördinate and suggest, but he will not dare tamper with the essentials. Better pictures will result, for the creative idea will flow unhampered from the mind of the writer to the screen. No one knows who wrote the first epics. The singer was all important. But dramatic art advanced, and although I am well aware that O'Neill wrote *Strange Interlude*, I'll be darned if I can name a single member of the cast, and the direction didn't enter my mind. Hollywood is advancing, too, and unless I am gravely mistaken, there'll be changes made.

A Few Aversions

▼▼ I HAVE MENTIONED before the Salvation Army in *Laughing Sinners*, *Miraele Woman* and *Salvation Nell*, and the strong reform motive in Mary Carr's religious exhortation in *Honeymoon Lane*. Then the other day I left the blind hero of *Miraele Woman* only to walk into another blind leading man in *The Magnifieent Lie*. Just for good measure I found a dummy carrying the love scenes in *Miracle Woman*, and a block down the street discovered a group of marionettes expressing the hero's love in *Hush Money*. Then there is a rush of *Mad Moments* and *Reekless Hours*, not to mention the celestial series which comprises blue, black, night or some other sort of angelic personages. Also there is *City Streets*, *City Lights*, *Street Scene* and the Ex-series. And so *ad nauseum* until I am ready to offer my kingdom to the title writer who will strike a new note.

In the news reels I am utterly weary of seeing steeplechases because they seem cruel to me and I am on the edge of my seat hoping the horse will clear the barrier without nicking its legs. I have mentioned before Warner Brothers' exploitation of Brunswick. I noted a similar complaint in an English publication, and since have seen another example, bringing the total to four pictures in which the Brunswick property was unnecessarily plugged. And I should like dialogue writers to spare Miss Stanwyck the necessity of saying "I've drank," and I don't like to hear Bobby Jones pronounce the *t* in often. I can't remember the picture in which Roosevelt was pronounced as though the first syllable were *ruse*, but I suppose it is a triviality about which reviewers should not get excited.

And Sophistication

▼▼ WHICH BRINGS me to another fault I find with present film stories. What change has come over the American public that it is so outrageously rich and so devilishly sophisticated? A good three quarters of the pictures I see are dominated by those sinfully wealthy folk who shoot things in Scotland, slide down hills at St. Moritz, slap thousand dollar notes on gambling jiggers in Monte Carlo or live in royal ceremony on Park Avenue. I am not saying that such people do not exist. I haven't seen any, to be sure. My acquaintance with them therefore is limited to Hergesheimer stories and motion pictures.

I know one or two people who possess a mere million or so, but they live in no such highfalutin atmosphere. And they are in middle age or even farther along, whereas the people whom I see on the screen never are more than thirty, and evidently have had nothing to do in the course of their happy years save to learn the art of spending money. I might mention that I am a young man, and that it is very difficult for me to step out of a theatre with a girl on my arm and expect to get just a little attention from her after she has spent an hour and a half with those princely fellows who cavort about in Hispano-Suizas and drink their liqueurs from crystal glasses. Mind now, I am not complaining. I am only offering a very personal objection, with no idea that it will be taken seriously.

▼▼ And the dialogue that runs through such affairs as *Rebound*, *Man in Possession*, *Common Law* and a great many others is so diabolically clever that I never believe it. I know from the outset that it is the work of a smart playwright—and that even he had to sweat like sin to cram so much sparkle in an hour and a half of entertainment. When I hear Robert Williams and Miss Claire scintillate verbally for a scene or two I become downright contemptuous of them.

I wish that I could meet them in their drawing rooms the day after the cook has walked out. I wager they would not be so hot. None of my friends have been accused of downright stupidity. Indeed all of them are normal, and one or two are a bit brighter than the average. But their conversation doesn't sound like screen dialogue. It sounds like conversation. It may not be as amusing as a piece of snappy screen fare, but it incontestably is more genuine. This is natural because my friends do not sit down before their social engagements and figure out tongue twisters and clever thrusts with which to confound and make uncomfortable their friends.

As a reward to the first dialogue writer who forsakes sophisticated cleverness and puts into the mouths of his characters conversation which is natural and genuine, I personally will autograph and send to him a copy of the *Spectator*, together with a picture taken of me when I was graduated from the eighth grade. If that won't bring results, nothing will. And in case he isn't a *Spectator* subscriber, I will knock off my commission on his subscription, providing he will send his check for twenty-six copies of the magazine. This offer stands for ten days.

These Student Uprisings

▼▼ OBSERVERS and editors are inclined to deal ponderously with the occasional student outbursts against compulsory military training in universities. When such a protest occurs the American Legion and the Civil Rights Union swing up their opposing heavy artillery and profound things are said. The truth of the whole matter is that students do not relish the inconvenience of changing clothes and marching about under a hot sun in pursuit of the humanities and higher education.

The reasons for what thoughtful folk term "a great student uprising against militarism" are not so subtle as they seem. First there is the change from campus clothes to military uniform, next the drill itself, third the shower which is essential for comfort during the rest of the day, and fourth, being late to class. Therein lies the mysterious secret of America's only student uprising.

Any frank collegian will admit it. If he drags the red herrings of protest against militarism and the barbarity of warfare across his trail, it only proves that he is a shrewd diplomat and will ultimately free himself from what he considers a foolish inconvenience. If military training goes out, it will be shortly followed by compulsory gymnasium work, which is nearly as bitter a pill to the young intellectuals as gun-toting.

Proletariat Art

▼▼ A VERY SERIOUS motion picture magazine, infrequent but not entirely new, is *Experimental Cinema*. The third issue, which I have read carefully and doubtfully, indicates the high artistic level which the publication has set up for itself. There are startling photographs and stimulating bits of prose. But I was suspicious when I read that the magazine would "succeed in establishing the ideological and organizational foundations of an American working-class cinema". And I was surfeited when I read comments on the "American imperialistic policy", "capitalistic propaganda", and "working-class audiences".

I do not recall ever having met a man who considered himself permanently a member of the working class. I know many who are undoubtedly members of such a class, but they will bristle at the suggestion. The American as a race is young and optimistic. He is content with the present system because there is fat in it. If he can not secure the fat, his children will, or his children's children—and they will

secure it without the fuss and strife of revolution. That is his dream. A dream may be untrue, but while it endures its potency is unquestionable.

Propaganda

▼▼ THE WHOLE problem of propaganda in art is debatable and disingenuous. All art is propaganda. Both Shelley and Harriet Beecher Stowe urged freedom, yet the difference between their work and the quality of their propaganda is immense. Shelley's propaganda was that of an intense individual; Mrs. Stowe's was born of a congealed social impulse. Shelley's work was art. Mrs. Stowe's was a miserable batch of untruth. The mass impulse in art, such as *Experimental Cinema* champions, is stultifying and priggish irrespective of what righteous cause it involves.

If the theme of Hollywood productions is capitalistic—and I am making no such admission—it is because the theme of every home in the country is capitalistic. Money and its accumulation are the foremost interest of a hundred and twenty million people, and the art, science and government of those people will only reflect the impulse. But meanwhile *Experimental Cinema* is sincere and sometimes brilliant. It will never be read by the working class it seeks to unshackle, but the best minds of Hollywood may make some money out of its suggestions.

▼ ▼ ▼

The Suggestive Film

(Cinematograph Times, London)

Film producers have been cultivating the art of suggestiveness till it is becoming a fine art. They hang on to the cliff of suggestion practically with their eyebrows. How they save themselves from falling into the abyss of indecency is sometimes quite marvelous. Whilst British producers are not wholly free from occasional lapses, especially in screening stage farces, the American producer positively revels in his art. He has, in film after film, recently carried suggestiveness to the extreme limit. Those films will not, apart from the so-called shop windows of the American firms concerned, be seen probably for some time to come, but the danger largely lies in the chances of them appearing just when in some one locality or another there is a movement for excluding children. Certainly those films are "A" films, but whilst it is possible to find films of this class which are wholly innocent of material calculated to justify exclusion, the busy enemy will rake out all those of the sort which have contrived to get upon the very edge without falling over.

Exhibitor Threat

(The Allied Exhibitor)

If the producers were merely producers, the exhibitor would be able to deal with them on a basis of equality. But since the producers own houses that exhibit pictures, sometimes in competition with the independents, there is no equality of bargaining except through organization on the part of the small exhibitors.

Sound in Small Theatres

(The Film Daily)

Theatres with a capacity of not more than 2,000 seats generally have better sound reproduction than larger houses, according to the semi-annual report of the S. M. P. E. progress committee. In houses of larger size the sound quality suffers considerably when the auditorium is only partly filled, whereas in the smaller houses this condition is not as serious.

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TRUMBO REVIEWS

A Tribute

▼▼ *STREET SCENE.* I have viewed all of those pictures which have set a high water mark for production effort in the new season. Genuinely fine entertainment has been produced. I think particularly of *Bad Girl, American Tragedy, Transatlantic, Waterloo Bridge* and *Star Witness.* Metro's *Susan Lenox* I have not yet seen, but from it I am expecting great things. And although I am well aware that I tread on dangerous ground when I fall into comparisons, I am bound to declare that *Street Scene* is one of the finest motion pictures I ever have seen; perhaps it is the finest. *Bad Girl,* despite splendid acting and brilliantly sympathetic direction, is merely a popular story. *American Tragedy* is a depressing, powerfully presented slice of life, but it is entirely negative in spirit. *Transatlantic* is purely and simply a directorial triumph for William K. Howard. *Waterloo Bridge* is a touching drama of renunciation, but its characters are animated by emotion rather than by intelligence. *Star Witness* is swift and tense, but too thoroughly provincial.

But *Street Scene* is dominated by an almost serene intelligence. It portrays the weaknesses and strength of the human animal with an unprejudiced camera. It is splendidly acted. The musical score by Alfred Newman deserves a paragraph in itself. And the direction by King Vidor is a thrilling piece of work, a blending of skill, restraint and imagination into a tremendously fine production. I am going to view this picture again before it leaves the city, and then perhaps once more. I am going to shout its praises. And I am going to thumb my nose at those aesthetes who contend that nothing good can come from that morass of greed which is called Hollywood.

▼▼ As for Sylvia Sidney in the role of *Rose Maurrant,* I can only report that she is superb. It will be remembered that I whooped to the skies *Confessions of a Co-ed*—a quite silly bunch of tripe—merely because Miss Sidney strengthened it so tremendously. Her work in *American Tragedy* was outstanding and fine. But in no previous picture have I seen her attain the heights of *Street Scene.* Everyone knows by this time the story of *Rose,* whose father murdered her mother and went to the electric chair for his crime. Everyone knows the high courage of *Rose* at the crisis, and her stalwart desertion of *Sam Kaplan* in order that he might complete his education. But everyone does not know the role as portrayed by Miss Sidney. The intelligence of her performance can but indicate a correspondingly high degree of intelligence in the young lady herself. She very shortly will become the first lady of the screen unless Paramount ruins her by too frequent efforts. I hail her work in *Street Scene* as superlatively fine.

It is tragically amusing that the last performance in which I saw William Collier, Jr., was that very messy affair, *Broadminded.* Frankly I had come to think that young Collier was incapable of a sincere role. Now I know differently. His *Sam Kaplan* is a striking piece of work. I am told that it is far superior to the legitimate. I can not judge there, because I missed the play. But I can say that producers should pay a lot more attention to Collier in the future. Estelle Taylor as the mother of *Rose* is slightly too beautiful for the part, but no complaint can be made of her portrayal. David Landau, as her husband is convincing. His work improves through the picture, and in the last scenes he dominates the screen. Outstanding among the lesser characters is George Humbert, and considerable praise is also due to Beulah Bondi and Anna Kostant.

I suspect that the greatness of *Street Scene* is largely a result of the flawless detail which went into it. The camera wanders from Gotham's skyline at dawn to a hungry kitten or a sleeping dog. Nothing is missed. I have mentioned the musical score, without which a great deal of the picture's beauty would have been lost. And I have mentioned King Vidor, but not, I think, that amazing succession of faces which stared momentarily into the camera on their way to the murder scene. The Russians have done nothing better. Credit can not evenly be divided on such a picture. *Street Scene* is an individual triumph for every person who shared in its production.

A Fair Mystery

▼▼ *MURDER AT MIDNIGHT,* although nothing to go into ecstasies about, is quite as good as most murder stories, and is the most finished production to come from the Tiffany lot in a long while. Phil Goldstone produced it, and Frank Strayer directed. That darling of the intelligentzia, Miss Aileen Pringle, takes the leading role. She is a beautiful but very evil young woman who inspires a complete cycle of murders. Hale Hamilton is the famous criminologist who, for the love of Aileen, directs the butchery, and Robert Elliott is the absurdly impolite detective who solves the whole affair. An actress not mentioned on my credit sheet turned in the most satisfying performance of the day as *Aunt Julia.*

I am puzzled and troubled and alarmed at the manner in which these murders are committed. The central idea of the plot was to dispose of Miss Pringle's husband. A game of charades was arranged, which called for the husband to shoot another gentleman. He shot, but unfortunately someone had replaced blank cartridges with real ones, and the recipient of the shot was quite dead. Then the husband was neatly murdered to make it appear a suicide. I couldn't understand why the first gentleman had to be shot at all. A little later the maid was killed, but how I am not quite certain. And the crowning bit of inconsistency came with the death of the butler. He picked up one of those loaded telephone receivers. You know the sort. The idea was used in *Whispering Wires* on the stage some ten years ago. A clicking of the receiver discharges a needle into the base of the brain. But when the poor butler clicked the receiver the wire had been clipped outside the house, so there was no electric current to discharge the mechanism which controlled the needle. But the poor fellow died anyhow, and that is that. Perhaps he was frightened.

Murder at Midnight is well directed, does not contain too much dialogue, and boasts settings considerably above the average of Tiffany productions. It will prove entertaining for all but one who simply insists that his murders be logical both as to motive and execution.

Right-O!

▼▼ *TOO MANY COOKS* is correctly titled. There are also too many words and too many evidences of the stage in this comedy directed for Radio by William Seiter. It is from a stage play, the title of which I have forgotten. Maybe it also is *Too Many Cooks.* I wonder if anyone has noticed that comedies adapted from the stage are invariably flat, whereas more serious efforts taken from the legitimate fare quite well on the screen. I wonder why that is. There was *Six Cylinder Love, Too Young to Marry, Ex-Bad Boy, The Girl Habit* (I liked it, but nobody else did) and so on down the line. But *Journey's End, Waterloo Bridge, Street Scene,* and a few others seemed to do quite nicely.

Bert Wheeler and Dorothy Lee take the parts of young lovers who are about to build a home and embark upon the matrimonial currents when a deluge of Cooks, relatives of the little girl, almost ruin the whole affair. To relieve any suspense you may feel about the outcome, I may as well confide that Mr. Wheeler and Miss Lee are reunited and married. Roscoe Ates furnishes some hilarious moments, not so much because he stutters as because he is an excellent comedian. Sharon Lynn and Robert McWade appear well cast.

Too Many Cooks appealed to me as old stuff very conventionally directed and acted. Everything about the picture was characterless and a little dull. Perhaps that is because I am not fond of Wheeler when he is at his best. But I think there are other reasons.

Dramatic and Thrilling

▼▼ *THE STAR WITNESS* is a swiftly moving highly dramatic picture that should make Warner Brothers a lot of money. It is the Warner answer to such excellent pictures as *Bad Girl, Transatlantic, American Tragedy, Waterloo Bridge, Sporting Blood,* and others that are ushering in what promises to be a season of achievement and redemption in Hollywood. In every way it deserves to be ranked with the five mentioned, and with them comprises the best group of photoplays that have been shown in months. In view of recent widespread demonstrations against gangland, and gangland's characteristic response in the form of bullets in the bodies of little children, it may be that *The Star Witness* will actually serve as a beneficial agent in consolidating opinion against the underworld. Certain it is that the gangsters here portrayed are murderous cowards, not calculated to arouse the admiration of youngsters.

The story deals with a gang killing that is witnessed by Grant Mitchell and his family, among whom Charles Sale and Dickie Moore are the outstanding characters. Mitchell gives an honest and touching characterization of the chief clerk who finally is intimidated into re-

fusing to testify at the preliminary hearing of the murderer, because of the kidnapping of his son, Dickie Moore. Frances Starr is the mother, and Sally Blane and Edward Nugent are the son and daughter of the family. The terror which strikes this very ordinary family is not beyond the realms of possibility, and furnishes very convincing story material. Charles Sale, as the grandfather, is the only one who refuses to bow to the threat of the gangsters that the abducted son will be killed if Ralph Ince, the murderer, is identified on the stand. The youngster who portrayed Dickie Moore's younger brother is a delight. Walter Huston as the district attorney lends a fire and intensity to his part which too often is lacking in actual life.

▼▼ WILLIAM A. WELLMAN gets the most from his script, and the drama he has developed at times approaches hysteria. The telephone call from the kidnapper is beautifully handled, and the search scenes are thrillingly photographed. The entire production is handled so logically that it can not fail to hold an audience from beginning to finish. Particularly did I admire the true American psychology of Charles Sale, who denounced "foreign hoodlums" in no uncertain terms, but completely failed to notice the sleek American lawyers who were so solicitous for the gangster's welfare. It is a stupid attitude, but it is so true that the producers are to be thanked for including it. *The Star Witness* is to be numbered among the really excellent pictures of the season.

Nothing Remarkable

▼▼ *TRAVELING HUSBANDS* wanders rather aimlessly through a maze of trivialities, and then surprisingly develops into a fairly good story. But it develops too late. By the time a genuine problem has arrived and a solution is approached, the audience has become so enmeshed in unnecessary dialogue that the whole point of the entertainment is lost. Paul Sloane, I suspect, heroically tried to advance the story, but the script called for too many detours. The result is merely another average program picture, although the blurbs assure me that it is a dramatic thunderbolt.

The story deals with the Babylonian existence of traveling salesmen, the liquor they consume, the gorgeous blondes with whom they sleep and the manner in which they mistreat their wives. Frank Albertson and Constance Cummings play the lovers and come through to a happy ending despite the imminence of a murder charge against Albertson. But their work is overshadowed by Evelyn Brent's really excellent portrayal of a salesman's rejected mistress, and the clever characterization of *Hymie Schwartz* given by Hugh Herbert. His work is delightful and almost worth the price of admission on its own merits.

The trouble with pictures such as *Traveling Husbands* is that they deal with such astoundingly commonplace people. Characters in a dramatic production must have outstanding possibilities either for good or evil before an audience can become genuinely interested in their fate. The characters in *Traveling Husbands* are outstanding in no sense of the word. A rather over-crowded universe could have gotten along quite nicely without any particular one of them, or the whole kaboodle, for that matter. And when an audience feels that way about characters, it is not going to tear down the box-office in a rush for seats. But as I said, Evelyn Brent and Hugh Herbert furnished some really interesting moments.

Barrymore, But Nothing More

▼▼ *GUILTY HANDS* gives us that flawless cynic, gentleman and actor, Mr. Lionel Barrymore in another delightful characterization. His presence in the cast is enough to make the world's worst picture entertaining. But *Guilty Hands*, far from being the world's worst, is a quite entertaining story from the pen of Bayard Veiller. W. S. Van Dyke handles the direction, and has assembled a smooth cast for a production which must rank slightly above the average program picture, and considerably below the level of genuinely fine productions.

Barrymore, in order to save his daughter, Madge Evans, from a degrading marriage to the ultra-villainous Alan Mowbray, kills the latter gentleman in a fashion which is so neat that only Kay Francis deduces the real facts. In a stirring scene Barrymore demonstrates just how, as district attorney, he will convict Miss Francis of the murder if she does not agree to the general verdict of suicide. The dead man himself solves the whole affair, by shooting Mr. Barrymore just as Kay is about to denounce him. Contraction of the muscles after death, you see. You don't believe it? Neither did I, but it furnishes a very satisfactory ending.

As a matter of comment, Miss Evans is progressing remarkably, and is very pretty to boot. C. Aubrey Smith is not an English lord in this picture, which alone makes it out of the ordinary. *Guilty Hands* will probably do a nice business, but I am certain it is trading on Barrymore's success in *Free Soul*. It is not at all up to the standard which should be set for the gentleman who, to my way of thinking, is the most outstanding member of a very talented family.

Mellerdrammer

▼▼ *CAUGHT* convinces me that Paramount has a terrible grudge against Richard Arlen. He has incurred the wrath of some high and mighty, and resultantly is being murdered in poor roles. The greatest actor of all time could not have been impressive in so faltering an effort as *Caught*, and although Arlen is not the greatest actor of all time, he is a capable young man who could be developed into a valuable property for his studio. Louise Dresser portrays *Calamity Jane*. Her acting is delightful, but the story is so hilariously ridiculous that her evident ability is almost submerged beneath the maze of impossibilities. Only Frances Dee does herself any good in this picture. She is very beautiful, and has a charming manner of speech.

Edward Sloman directed the peculiar affair. Louise Dresser, you see, is a frontier gal with a heart of gold and the exterior of a rattlesnake. Her cattle rustling activities excite the interest of the government, and Richard Arlen comes galloping along with half the United States army to wipe Louise from the face of the map. But just as he has the evidence, he gets into a fearful jam. The stout-hearted Louise is about to

bump him off when, marvel of marvels, she discovers that he is her son! What a relief! So he escapes with Frances Dee, and Louise and Tom Kennedy ride off in the night, forever afterward fugitives, hunted from sage brush to cedar scrub—and all for something or other. I wish the gentleman who conceived this preposterous affair had been caught before he collected his check.

Romance of the Streets

▼▼ *WATERLOO BRIDGE*. I liked this Universal picture tremendously. It is pure romance, delicately handled and beautifully developed. More than any picture in the last year it reminds me of *Seventh Heaven*, because the two principals are so obviously bewildered and stricken by events that everything but their love for each other seems superficial. Mae Clarke as the chorus girl who was forced by circumstance into the role of a prostitute on Waterloo Bridge, and Kent Douglass as the young and impressionable British Tommy, give superb characterizations. Their supporting cast is well chosen and assists in making the production one that I will not soon forget.

The story is one of renunciation. With a mind which experience has made penetrating, Mae Clarke sees that her love for Douglass has been forged under stress, and that when the strain of war has vanished the bond likewise will disappear. Her hysterical refusal of his marriage offer is a beautiful bit of acting, and should place her high among the few who possess genuine dramatic ability. Kent Douglass is perfectly cast. Although the story is not directly about the war, one can see too clearly the devastating events which have rushed in upon the boy. War is in his face, although the front is hundreds of miles distant. One almost feels the blinding necessity for love as an escape from the barbarity of conflict. The sequences which show the two in Mae's cheap room are tender and gripping.

▼▼ DESPITE THE tragic ending when the little prostitute is blown to bits in an air raid, the story is gentle. Enid Bennett is Douglass's mother, and she behaves in a very unconventional and highly sensible fashion by treating his sweetheart with consideration and sympathy. Frederick Kerr as the step-father is delightful, although his frequent references to Bumpstead are character labels which come directly from the legitimate stage. Ethel Griffies is excellent as a stern and disapproving landlady. Doris Lloyd and Bette Davis are well cast.

Some very proficient camera work is in evidence, not only in the stirring air raid scenes, but also in the interior shots. In one sequence the camera follows Miss Clarke from a hallway into a dining room very cleverly. Miss Clarke enters one door and the camera another, so that the audience loses sight of her only when the thickness of the wall interferes. The story is adapted from Robert E. Sherwood's play, and owes a major portion of its beauty as a motion picture to Director James Whale.

I Fight the Jungle

▼▼ *EAST OF BORNEO* furnished more thrills than I was prepared to withstand, in consequence of which I wrestled in my sleep with the identical python that slid over a sleeping native in the picture. I was not so shrewd as the native, who awakened, stiffened quietly, and waited for the serpent to complete its crossing. I wrestled with the snake, was nearly strangled, and awakened in a very trying position with the covers badly disarranged. This may prove that I am a fool or that *East of Borneo* is a thoroughly exciting picture, or both. But if the snake episode does not stir you, Universal in hearty cooperation with director George Melford will show you a duel between a man and a tiger, a race between a native and a swamp full of alligators, or a volcano in full eruption. You may have your choice. That I chose to be excited by the python is because I have an almost feminine aversion to reptiles.

Beside such hair-raising occurrences the story becomes almost insignificant. It deals with Rose Hobart, who makes a dangerous trip to the interior of Borneo (I think) to find Charles Bickford, her estranged husband. There she falls into the hands of Georges Renavent, the local prince. His affections become so ardent that she is forced to shoot him, which is too bad, because a native prophecy has decreed that upon the death of the royal line a nearby volcano will erupt and wipe the kingdom from the earth. This is precisely what happens, and it is only by sheer good luck that the reunited man and wife make their escape. I have a protest to file with directors, story writers and producers. It has to do with Oriental potentates. Is it absolutely necessary that they always be such suave, cultured, oily scoundrels? I hope to see one some day with hair growing from his nose and arms like an ape. But that, of course, is merely my personal reaction.

The photography by George Robinson is superb. There must have been plenty of faking going on, but where I can not say. The dialogue by Edwin H. Knopf is remarkably well done. Many portions of the picture are silent as to speech, and where speech is recorded it is brief and to the point. No jungle film I have seen does as well on sound effects, which were so good here that I almost could feel the fetid jungle air which bred the insects and animals of the picture. *East of Borneo* is a thoroughly agreeable production.

Borzage Deals with Reality

▼▼ *BAD GIRL* is a touching and beautiful picture. It is, moreover, a story told with utter fidelity. To a certain extent it shattered one of my fondest delusions; i. e., that a picture brimming with dialogue can not be a truly good picture. I am wrong. *Bad Girl* talks from beginning to end, but it has one advantage over others that are equally voluble but less entertaining. Regardless of dialogue, the story is told with the camera. The words are not permitted to interfere with the flow of the story or the emotional abilities of the characters. Borzage is primarily a motion picture director, as *Seventh Heaven* attested, and his success with *Bad Girl* is largely the result of his schooling in the silent days. Some of the talkie directors over at Paramount should study his methods and their little society melodrama formula might seem less like a compressed dictionary, and more like a motion picture.

There are many encouraging things happening in Hollywood these days. Chief among them is the rise of new stars, youngsters unknown yesterday who to-day are turning out dramatic performances of the first water. This, of course, is attributable to skilful direction. James Dunn and Sally Eilers perform magnificently as a pair of utterly normal lovers, hemmed in by the city streets, galled by the sting of economic struggle, superficially cheap but fundamentally clean. The story of their marriage and of the arrival of their child is a very commonplace one, yet as Borzage has given it to us on the screen it is as vast and as universal as life itself. Something momentous looms behind every scene, so that the audience feels a personal problem and is immeasurably relieved when a satisfactory solution is reached.

▼▼ IT IS SILLY, of course, to say that the performance of James Dunn, when he threw off his veneer of bravado and pleaded with a great surgeon to attend the birth of his child, is the best I ever have seen. Reviewers are too easily set off into ecstasy about anything which is fine, chiefly because fine things are so scarce. But I can say that Dunn touched me deeply, and he touched those who sat near me. And the desperate cry of Miss Eilers as she rushed through the hospital corridor after her baby was startlingly realistic. The note of elemental menace rather than entreaty in her voice was a revelation. Behind that cry lay the touch of an artist.

Minna Gombell deserves a paragraph all to herself for the splendid work which she delivered as Miss Eilers' companion, and William Pawley and Frank Darien comprised the other principals. *Bad Girl* is one of the season's high lights.

A Plea for Joan

▼▼ *THIS MODERN AGE*, let it be understood from the outset, is a good picture. It has entertainment value, an excellent cast, and some clever bits of direction by Nicholas Grinde, whose work is new to me. It is so far superior to *Laughing Sinners* that a comparison of the two is almost ludicrous. The story is neither an absolutely new one, nor a particularly elevating one. But when everything is considered, *This Modern Age* is much better than the average program picture. My complaint is aroused by the pitiful lack of judgment which is used by Metro in casting Miss Crawford.

There seems to be an idea in the heads of those gentlemen who have this talented actress under contract that she is essentially modern, and that she should not appear in anything that does not smack of freedom to the last cocktail. The tremendous vitality of Miss Crawford has been wasted on puny themes. Her age in this latest picture is supposed to be nineteen summers. With all respect to Joan, she does not appear to be that young. Her features are strongly developed and full of a purpose which nineteen years can not impart. Nobody under twenty-five has much sense anyhow, and all over twenty-five haven't enough to be really remarkable. I am immediately prejudiced when I see these young things on the screen wrestling with grim problems and overcoming them with the experience of past masters. It simply isn't being done in real life.

▼▼ BUT ASIDE from the age proposition, Miss Crawford's greatest strength lies

in her dramatic ability. Thus far I have seen nothing in her pieces which comes up to the actress herself. I should like to see her as a young mother of say thirty years, confronted with a genuinely dramatic problem. Or if that is too specific, in some role which requires maturity and a high degree of intelligence to overcome the problems presented. I am certain that a new Joan would emerge, and that screen art would be ornamented by the change.

But as for *This Modern Age* . . . it is a tale of a young girl who comes to Paris, finds her mother the mistress of Albert Conti, and very narrowly escapes falling into the genially evil clutches of Monroe Owsley. In the end Neil Hamilton captures her with his virtue and his football record. Pauline Frederick as the mother is delightful, proving once more that she is the true patrician of motion pictures.

Fu Manchu Returns

▼▼ *DAUGHTER OF THE DRAGON* gives us once more that amazingly ingenious oriental. *Fu Manchu*, in the person of Warner Oland, and before the old gentleman has been neatly dispatched by a bullet he accomplishes more mischief per minute than any screen murderer I have seen. But worse still, he pledges his lovely daughter, Anna May Wong, to continue those homicidal activities to which he set himself, with the result that Mr. Bramwell Fletcher's life is not worth a thin dime until the very last sequence. Even then I was a little worried about him, for these Orientals seem so devilishly clever that a revival from the dead is but a minor trick.

I can not say honestly that *Daughter of the Dragon* thrilled me. It is a well developed affair with excellent sets, and some good direction by Lloyd Corrigan. But I couldn't believe it. The opening shot of London almost had me convinced, but the air of reality soon slipped from the piece, and I was thoroughly aware that I was viewing a performance—a performance by capable players, I grant, but still a performance. For example I could not believe that the injunction of a father whom she had seen for but an hour could influence Miss Wong to murder her lover. Oriental mysticism and devotion to the contrary. I simply could not believe it. The one thing which I demand from a murder or mystery tale is that I be allowed to accept it as perfect and holy truth. If I can not, then the whole thing is lost.

Miss Wong and Sessue Hayakawa turned in distinguished performances, and their eventual union in death was exceedingly well handled. Bramwell Fletcher and Frances Dade were overshadowed by the Oriental pair, but their work was none the less satisfactory. Nicholas Soussanin as the sinister manager of Miss Wong was excellent. And of course Warner Oland's characterization was grave and full of menace. Impressive and elaborate sets assisted the story materially. It is a Paramount picture.

▼ ▼ ▼

The Awakening

(Reel Journal)

The trouble with the movies to-day is that the novelty of sound has worn off and there are only a few directors who have learned what to do with it—or their producers have not learned. There is too much domination of the screen by the sales departments of the film distributing companies. If you don't believe this, how do you explain some of the idiotic titles—box-office titles—that are really driving many fans away from the box-offices?

Give the fans a good picture, like *Millionaire, All Quiet*, etc., and they'll come out again from those holes—golf and otherwise—to make a real box-office showing. All the price reduction in the world won't drag them to the theatres.

A Birthday Gift

(Alexander Bakshy, The Nation)

On this, the third anniversary of the talking picture (*The Jazz King* startled the world in the summer of 1928), I find myself unable to offer the usual congratulations. The promise the talking picture held out at its birth of growing into something worthy of public respect and even admiration has not been fulfilled. To-day it looks so utterly sick both in body and mind that unless some drastic change takes place it seems destined to drag on a miserable existence as a deformed and blabbering half-wit.

Changed Musical Taste

(Eric M. Knight, Public Ledger, Philadelphia)

So Hollywood assumes that, not liking the music they have given us, we don't like music at all. It is not so. I believe the movie world will seize with joy upon any movie that gives us good music. I do not demand the three B's for public consumption. There are many lighter affairs that will please the best ears, however, and still interest a great public.

The truth of the matter is that the general public is tired of jazz. Within the last two years I have noticed a change. There has been a swing toward the seductiveness of South American tangoes, queerly accented dance tunes of Spanish-America and the sweet tunes of the bygone Viennese waltz era.

Reviewed in this Number

▼ ▼

BAD GIRL—

A Fox picture. Directed by Frank Borzage; from the novel by Vina Delmar; continuity and dialogue by Edwin Burke; photographed by Chester Lyons; recording engineer, G. P. Costello; art director, William Darling; film editor, Margaret Clancey.

The cast: Sally Eilers, James Dunn, Minna Gombell, William Pawley, Frank Darien.

CAUGHT—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Edward Sloman; story by Agnes Brand Leahy and Keene Thompson; additional dialogue by Bella and Sam Spewack; photographed by Charles Lang.

The cast: Richard Arlen, Louise Dresser, Frances Dee, Tom Kennedy, Martin Burton, Marcia Manners, Sid Saylor, Guy Oliver, E. J. LeSaint, Charles K. French, Lon Poff, James Mason, Jack Clifford.

DAUGHTER OF THE DRAGON—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Lloyd Corrigan; from the story by Sax Rohmer; adaptation by Lloyd Corrigan and Monte M. Katterjohn; dialogue by Sidney Buchman; photographed by Victor Milner; recording engineer, Earl S. Hyman.

The cast: Anna May Wong, Warner Oland, Sessue Hayakawa, Bramwell Fletcher, Frances Dade, Holmes Herbert.

EAST OF BORNEO—

A Universal picture. Directed by George Melford; story and continuity by Dale Van Every; dialogue by Edwin H. Knopf; photographed by George Robinson; recording engineer, C. Roy Hunter; art director, Danny Hall; technical advisor, Lal Chand Mehra; film editor, Arthur Tavares; editorial supervisor, Mau-

rice Pivar; production supervisor, Paul Kohner.

The cast: Rose Hobart, Charles Bickford, Georges Renavent, Lupita Tovar, Noble Johnson.

GUILTY HANDS—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by W. S. Van Dyke; story, adaptation and dialogue by Bayard Veiller; photographed by Merritt B. Gerstad; film editor, Anne Bauchens.

The cast: Lionel Barrymore, Kay Francis, Madge Evans, William Bakewell, C. Aubrey Smith, Polly Moran, Alan Mowbray, Forrester Harvey, Charles Crockett, Henry Barrows.

HOMICIDE SQUAD—

A Universal picture. Directed by George Melford and Edward Cahn; from the story, *The Mob*, by Henry La Cossitt; adaptation by Charles Logue; photographed by George Robinson; recording engineer, C. Roy Hunter; art director, Stanley Fleischer; film editor, Arthur Tavares; editorial supervisor, Maurice Pivar; production supervisor, Sam Bischoff.

The cast: Leo Carrillo, Noah Beery, Mary Brian, Russell Gleason, Walter C. Percival, J. Carrol Naish, George Brent.

HUSH MONEY—

A Fox picture. Directed by Sidney Lanfield; story and adaptation by Philip Klein and Courtney Terrett; dialogue by Dudley Nichols; photographed by John Seitz; recording engineer, E. C. Ward.

The cast: Joan Bennett, Hardie Albright, Owen Moore, Myrna Loy, C. Henry Gordon, Douglas Cosgrove, George Byron, André Cheron, Henry Armetta, George Irving, Nella Walker, Joan Castle.

MURDER AT MIDNIGHT—

A Tiffany picture. Directed by Frank Strayer; story by Frank Strayer and W. Scott Darling; photographed by William Rees; recording engineer, Carson Jowett; settings by Ralph DeLacy.

The cast: Hale Hamilton, Leslie Fenton, Robert Elliott, William Humphrey, Aileen Pringle, Kenneth Thomson, Alice White, Brandon Hurst, Robert Ellie, Tyrell Davis.

PUBLIC DEFENDER—

A Radio picture. Directed by J. Walter Ruben; story by George Goodschild; adaptation and dialogue by Bernard Schubert; photographed by Edward Cronjager; film editor, Archie Marshek.

The cast: Richard Dix, Shirley Grey, Edmund Breese, Paul Hurst, Purnell Pratt, Alan Roscoe, Boris Karloff, Ruth Weston, Nella Walker, William Halligan, Frank Sheridan, Carl Gerrard.

SPORTING BLOOD—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Charles Brabin; from the story, *Horseflesh*, by Frederick Hazlett Brennan; screen play by Willard Mack and Wanda Tuchock; photographed by Harold Rosson.

The cast: Clark Gable, Ernest Torrence, Marie Prevost, J. Farrell MacDonald, Eugene Jackson, Madge Evans, Lew Cody, Hallam Cooley, John Larkin, "Tommy Boy".

STAR WITNESS—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by William A. Wellman; story by Lucien Hubbard; photographed by James Van Trees; art director, John J. Hughes; film editor, Hal McLernon.

The cast: Walter Huston, Charles (Chic) Sale, Frances Starr, Grant Mitchell, Dickie Moore, Ralph Ince, Tom Dugan, Fletcher Norton, Guy d'Ennery, Mike Donlin, Sally Blane, Edward Nugent, George Ernest, Russell Hopton, Robert Elliott, Noel Madison, Nat Pendleton.

STREET SCENE—

A Samuel Goldwyn production, released by United Artists. Directed by King Vidor; from the Elmer Rice Pulitzer Prize drama of the same name; photographed by George Barnes; assistant director, Lucky Humberstone; art director, Richard Day; film editor, Hugh Bennett.

The cast: Sylvia Sidney, William Collier, Jr., Max Montor, David Landau, Estelle Taylor, Russell Hopton, Walter Miller, Greta Granstedt, Beulah Bondi, T. H. Manning, Matthew McHugh, Adele Watson, John M. Qualen, Anna Kostant, Nora Cecil, Margaret Robertson, Lambert Rogers, Allan Fox, George Humbert, Eleanor Wesselhoeft.

THIS MODERN AGE—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Nicholas Grinde; story by Mildred Cram; adaptation and dialogue by Sylvia Thalberg and Frank Butler; photographed by Charles Rosher; recording engineer, Douglas Shearer; film editor, William LeVanway.

The cast: Joan Crawford, Pauline Frederick, Neil Hamilton, Monroe Owsley, Hobart Bosworth, Emma Dunn, Albert Conti, Adrienne d'Ambricourt, Marcelle Corday.

TOO MANY COOKS—

A Radio picture. Directed by William Seiter; story and dialogue by Frank Craven; adaptation by Jane Murfin; photographed by Nick Musuraca.

The cast: Bert Wheeler, Dorothy Lee, Sharon Lynn, Roscoe Ates, Robert McWade, Hallam Cooley, Florence Roberts, Clifford Dempsey, George Chandler.

TRAVELING HUSBANDS—

A Radio picture. Directed by Paul Sloane; story and adaptation by Humphrey Pearson; photographed by Leo Tover; recording engineer, Clem Portman; lyrics and music by Max Steiner; art director, Max Rée; assistant director, Charles Kerr; associate producer, Myles Connolly.

The cast: Evelyn Brent, Frank Albertson, Constance Cummings, Carl Miller, Spencer Charters, Hugh Herbert, Frank McHugh, Purnell Pratt, Dorothy Peterson, Rita La Roy, Gwen Lee, Lucille Williams, Tom Francis, Stanley Fields.

WATERLOO BRIDGE—

A Universal picture. Directed by James Whale; from the play of the same name by Robert E. Sherwood; adaptation and added dialogue by Benn Levy; continuity by Tom Reed; photographed by Arthur Edeson; recording engineer, C. Roy Hunter; art director, Danny Hall; film editor, Clarence Kolster; editorial supervisor, Maurice Pivar.

The cast: Mae Clarke, Kent Douglass, Doris Lloyd, Enid Bennett, Bette Davis, Frederick Kerr, Ethel Griffies, Rita Carlisle.

WICKED—

A Fox picture. Directed by Alan Dwan; adaptation by Adela Rogers St. Johns; continuity and dialogue by Kenyon Nicholson and Kathryn Scola; photographed by Peverell Marley; recording engineer, George Leverett; associate producer, John W. Considine, Jr.

The cast: Elissa Landi, Victor McLaglen, Theodor von Eltz, Una Merkel, Allan Dinehart, Edmund Breese, Blanche Payson, Kathleen Kerrigan, Eileen Percy, Mae Busch, Irene Rich, Ruth Donnelly.

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HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

NOVEMBER
1931

Sherwood Does Some More Muttering

Going Highbrow on Screen Fundamentals

How Much Credit Should Writers Get?

And Still They are Turning out Flops

Reviewed in This Number

GRAFT
SKYLINE
BOUGHT
SIDE SHOW
PARDON US
MAD PARADE
LAST FLIGHT
THE BARGAIN
PERSONAL MAID
HEAVEN ON EARTH
NIGHT LIFE IN RENO
ROAD TO SINGAPORE
MORALS FOR WOMEN
MY SIN
GOLDIE
CISCO KID
DEVOTION
SOB SISTER
THE SPIDER
HIGH STAKES
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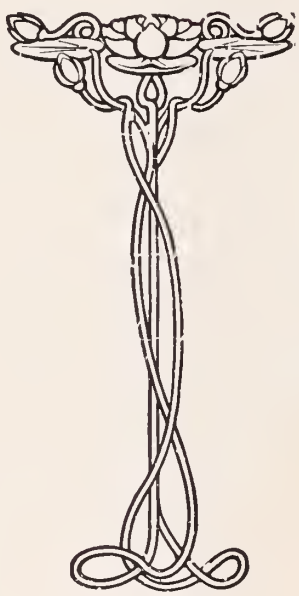
DIRECTOR



Warner Brothers-First National

The Editor's Views

"Devotion" and Fundamentals

THEY'LL BE MAKING talkies for a long time before they make a finer one than *Devotion*. I don't think any other that is made in the future will come as near to my personal idea of what a talkie should be—will come as near to giving me seventy or eighty minutes of such thorough intellectual enjoyment as was provided by this Pathé picture so ably directed by Robert Milton and starring that glorious actress, Ann Harding. It appeals only to the mind, not to the heart, for it is done so brilliantly that the viewer has thoughts only for the manner in which the story is presented and none for the story itself. It is in their capacity as artists that we enjoy Miss Harding, Leslie Howard and Robert Williams. It is hard to grade such excellence as the three display, but I think the chief acting honors go to Howard.

What an artist this young Englishman is! His deft touches, everything about him from the movement of his eyebrows to the set of his shoulders, from his fleeting glance to his journey down a long room—his voice, the rare intelligence behind the reading of his lines—all combine to make the characterization he is presenting an extraordinary example of histrionic art at a high point of its development. Miss Harding gives what seems to me to be the best performance of her screen career. The scenes which she shares with Howard are so delightful that they made me want to giggle with joy. The same can be said of her scenes with Williams, who also more than fulfills the promise of really fine things that his first screen appearance gave us.

▼▼ WHEN I HAVE tried to impress upon the film industry the advisability of its observing the principles of screen art in the manufacture of its product, I was met always with the same answer—that picture-making is a business, not an art. Of course only fools would regard it so, but I am quoting fools. Let's take *Devotion*. It comes as near to being an artistic triumph as a talkie probably ever will attain, which should cause me to give it three cheers. I do. I cheer for it as a work of art at the same time as I wonder what possessed Pathé to make it. Even if its cost had been moderate it will not make money. It has too great a load to carry. It is burdened financially with a long accumulation of the Harding salary which is so big that Charlie Rogers was congratulated by the press when he agreed to pay it; it has other big salaries to pay and an expensive production to take care of—and it simply can't do it.

The film industry never has made money by trying to sell screen entertainment that appealed only to the artistic sense of its patrons. The stage, for all the centuries it has been developing, never got beyond showing the finest examples of its art in anything bigger than a little theatre. The greatest crowd never has followed the greatest artist. There is something bigger, finer, more stirring than an appeal only to a developed sense of appreciation of technical perfection reflected in an art creation. It is an appeal straight to the heart of the beholder, an appeal to those elemental emotions that are common to all of us, to the man who can enjoy art in its highest manifestation of craftsmanship as well as to him who takes his with the heart, not with the mind. Granting that the screen is a business, it would seem as if it would be better business for it to make its appeal to the larger market. It made itself great by selling entertainment that appealed to our emotions, and it never can maintain its greatness by switching to a product that appeals only to our sense of the artistic.

▼▼ *Devotion* is a picture of which Pathé has every reason to be proud. I congratulate Charlie Rogers. I hang laurels on the brow of my friend, Bob Milton, for his brilliant direction. But I feel sorry for my friend Hiram Brown who has to worry about the Pathé money and who has to provide two-hundred million dollars' worth of theatres with entertainment that will make them pay. The film business demonstrated continuously for thirty years that it could earn dividends by selling entertainment whose appeal was a known quantity—an appeal

WELFORD BEATON, EDITOR VOL. 12, NO. 9 ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, ASSOCIATE
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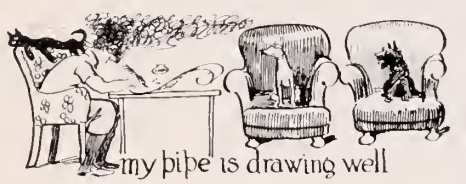
directly to the emotions that are common to all of us, irrespective of the extent of our mental development. Now it is trying to earn dividends by selling us something that in appealing only to our intellects, competes with every other intellectual diversion that one can find. The silent screen had no competition.

The screen is the only art that can tell us a complete story without referring anything to our intellects for interpretation. What we hear has to be interpreted by our intellects before it can make an appeal to our emotions. What we see appeals directly to our emotions. When I wrote something like that three years ago in course of some articles that pointed out why the box-office success that talkies were achieving then could not continue, nearly two hundred publications here and abroad ascribed to me the statement that screen audiences had no brains. When I claimed that silent pictures did not employ the intellects of their viewers, I did not mean that such intellects



did not exist; I meant that silent pictures gave them a rest. Just because you have an intellect, you do not want to use it all the time. Just because you have legs, you don't feel it incumbent upon you to run around all the time. Occasionally you like to sit down.

▼▼ *Devotion* will not be a box-office success because its appeal is solely to the intellect, and screen audiences have tired of using their intellects all the time. They would like them to have a spell of sitting down. They want motion pictures and they are not getting them. That is the story that the box-office is telling us. It is a story that is being interpreted in a great many different ways by the overlords of our film world who are having a devil of a time trying to make it appear as if they were not responsible for the present plight of their industry. But they are responsible. If they had intellects equal to grappling with the present situation, they would know that the force of some natural law is responsible for the low state of the film exchequer, and they would try to discover what the natural law is and how it works.

This epistle started off to be merely a review of *Devotion*, but my pipe is drawing well, each of the dogs is in his own big chair, the majestic length of the big black cat is stretched across the top of the back of my big chair, She is sitting not far away, smiling at something in a book; the house is quiet, and I feel in a particularly chatty mood. Let us go on and see where it gets us. We may go highbrow before we get through. I have said many times that audiences do not want their stories told in dialogue, but I never have given the present *Spectator* audience the fundamental reason for it, never for my new readers have I made reference to the natural law that governs screen art. This might be a good night to go into the matter.

▼▼ THE SCREEN is an art of illusion. You can't get away from that. Nothing on the screen is real, not even the motion. Still pictures flash by us and our imaginations supply the motion. Our imaginations make shadows real people, supply the third dimension, and perform every other function necessary to the creation of a perfect illusion of reality. In the silent days only our visual sense was employed and our other senses rested. In all its elements the art was perfect, even though it was rarely that the elements were handled in a manner that resulted in perfect product. Then came talk. It is an alien element, and the more it is used, the more it makes imperfect the art creation whose sale to the public is the film industry's sole business. It transfers our consideration of screen entertainment from our emotions to our intellects. Why? What is speech, anyway? It is here that we fill our pipes again and then go highbrow.

Man is the only animal that talks. It is only in his outward form that he differs from other animals. He is kept alive in the same manner as the horse or the hog is kept alive: by the actions of his heart and lungs. In all other animals blood is pumped by the same mechanical means as keep it circulating in man. All the lower animals have brains. Physiologists long since have abandoned their efforts to find anything in man's brain that differentiates it from the brains of many animals. The brain of the chimpanzee, for instance, as far as structure goes, presents us with not only every lobe, but with each convolution of the human brain. Huxley has demonstrated that the human brain has not even one peculiarity not found in a baboon's brain. In fact, from a structural or physical standpoint there is no reason why a baboon shouldn't develop into a bridge player, a supervisor or an orator.

▼▼ BUT THERE are accomplishments that have been achieved only by man, and the most eminent authorities that I have consulted confess that they do not know how man can be explained. His tremendous ascendancy over other animals is due to his acquired faculty of speech. It is not a natural faculty. If he were born with it, he would begin to talk in his cradle. It is purely a mental faculty and he can not indulge in it until he has developed the portions of his brain that give him the power. It is a complex development. Let me quote from an authority: "It is a part of the left superior temporal convolution which hears words; it is a part of the left angular gyrus which sees words; and it is the left Broca's convolution which utters words." Without understanding the terms any more

than I do, you will grasp the fact that when a man listens, reads or talks, his brain is kept busy. He can feel happy without any mental effort, but when he begins to tell us why he is happy he has to use some of his mental energy. A baby cries long before it can tell us why it cries.

The fact that speech is artificial and not instinctive is indicated by the manner in which it fails us even under circumstances that are little out of the ordinary. It does not take a great deal to make us too happy for words, speechless from wrath or dumb from fright. But the failure of our faculty of speech under such circumstances in no way tempers the force

of our emotions; we still can dance when we're happy, fight when we're mad, and run when we're frightened. At such times we become elemental and are governed entirely by our emotions. Our intellects are not involved, for if they stayed on the job we would be able to give vocal expression to our feelings, for the intellect must function before we can talk, listen intelligently to talk, or read understandingly what is written. One of the most exhausting tasks that the intellect can perform is to listen intently to a spoken discourse. It is so exhausting that he is a rare orator who can hold a man's attention for any appreciable length of time. It does not exhaust us to watch a man dance for joy, but it takes something out of us if we have to listen to him telling us why he is joyful. The dance goes straight to our emotions, while his conversation must be sorted out in our brain.

▼▼ PUT THE MAN in a motion picture. If the picture be silent it tells its story directly to our emotions; if it be a dialogue picture it tells the story to our intellects. Obviously, therefore, the introduction of talking into screen art changes that art fundamentally. But you will have to acknowledge that if there had been a fundamental weakness in pictures it would have bobbed up its head a long time before sound devices were thought of; and, further, that pictures could not have gone as far as they did if they had suffered from a fundamental weakness of a magnitude sufficient to demand such revolutionary treatment. Screen art became the world's greatest entertainment force solely because it complied with a natural law. It will maintain its place only as long as that law is not violated. The introduction of spoken words is a violent and deadly violation.

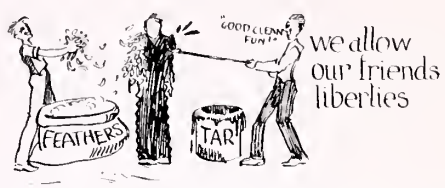
The mistake made by the producers, a mistake that was due to their absolute ignorance of the fundamentals of their business, was that of giving over their pictures entirely to the disturbing element, instead of using that element as sparingly as possible to replace a disturbing element that always had existed in silent pictures—the printed title. They still cling to that initial mistake. *Devotion* is evidence of Pathé's misunderstanding of the business it is in. It pays Ann Harding an enormous salary and persistently refuses to let her earn it. Instead of allowing her to develop as a motion picture actress and acquire a growing audience by appearing in motion pictures, it photographs her as she delivers speeches and thus dissipates the huge audience she gained when speeches coming from the screen had novelty value.

I am going to take the dogs out, and then to bed.

Stories and People

EVERY TIME I find myself in the vicinity of H. M. Robertson's dog store I pay it a visit and spend some time playing with the aristocratic puppies that always are on exhibition there. Their antics amuse me because I like puppies, and because I like them, it is not hard for them to amuse me. When I visit people I like, it is not hard for them to entertain me. I enjoy being with them and can derive a degree of pleasure from anything they do. A man whom I like can tell me a dull story and I will find it interesting. A man whom I dislike can tell me an entertaining story and it will fail to entertain me. My likes and dislikes are the governing factors in determining the amount of intellectual enjoyment I derive from contact with others.

When I view a motion picture I enjoy it in the degree that my emotions are stirred by the people in it. If the hero and heroine have personalities that appeal to me, or if they are characterized in a manner that earns my temporary affection for them, I enjoy the time I spend with them, I share their joys and sorrows and am pleased with the picture because I have derived emotional enjoyment from it, enjoyment which compensates me for any weak spots there may be in the story. In other words, if a producer presents to me characters whom I regard as friends, I am so pleased with them that they can do almost anything and I will be satisfied. It is not an individual complex. You have it also. It is a fundamental human complex. We allow our friends liberties. I have many who could barge in on me now as I write and I would enjoy their com-



ing; but if any strangers, or people to whom I am indifferent, barged in, I would be furious. And still all of them would be doing the same thing. What matters is who does it.

▼▼ IT WOULD SEEM, therefore, that the easiest way for a producer to please me, and you, with a motion picture, would be to assemble in it people we will like and who will command our immediate interest. We can not become interested in what screen characters are doing until we become interested in the characters themselves. When Elissa Landi's baby is taken from her in *Wicked*, I am not interested because the character she plays does not interest me. When Jimmy Dunn pleads with the doctor in *Bad Girl*, I am stirred emotionally because I have great affection for the young man and his wife and view with distress the possibility of unhappiness coming to them. As a consequence, I was bored by *Wicked* and enjoyed *Bad Girl* immensely.

Since I have gone into the story-consultant business, I look first in the stories I read for characters I can like. If I find none, I am not interested, and if an author can not interest me in his script, a director could not interest me in a picture made from it. The first task to which I set my clients is the creation of characters who have definite personalities. I tell them that I must love their heroes and hate their villains before I can care a continental what happens to them. Our enjoyment of a motion picture depends upon the extent to which things happen as we want them to happen, and until the people on the screen become real to us we can not care what happens to them.

Producers spend too much time in looking for stories and not enough in looking for characters. If we look over the outstanding successes among the motion pictures made during the past ten years, and exclude the few that were successful because of their magnitude and their box-office values as spectacles, we find that most of the stories were no better in themselves than the stories in the pictures that were concurrent flops. In each case success was due to the fact that the picture pre-

sented us with people we could love, and the things that happened to them held our attention only because of the love. If the producers would devote more thought to characterizations, they would find that they could devote less to the construction of their stories and be more successful than they are to-day. The most interesting study of mankind is man.

▼▼ WHEN THE epidemic of gangster pictures first broke out it was successful at the box-office. If such pictures had retained their drawing power, we now would be getting as many of them as we got at the height of the epidemic. The drawing power diminished because the pictures at best were mechanical, and when we had seen over and over again all the mechanical actions that make up the gangster's life, we tired of them

policemen to be something besides Irish

because by way of compensation they did not present us characters who in themselves were interesting enough to hold our interest and our sympathy. Producers ascribe the passing of the gangster picture to the public's change of mind. The public never changes its mind. Fundamentally we differ in no way from our grandparents.

In the selection of their story material, as in their every other endeavor in connection with the making of their pictures, producers betray how ignorant they are of the fundamentals that govern the business of creating entertainment. The nearest approach to an understanding is their belief in the fact that all the world loves a lover. But that is as far as they go. They do not grasp the elemental fact that all the world obviously must love anything lovable. In order to supply the taste for lovers they put a romance in every picture; they present young people as parties to the romances, and because the romances prove popular they arrive at the conclusion that the public wants only young people on the screen, and they exert all their efforts to build their stories around young people exclusively.

▼▼ THERE IS box-office value in anything on the screen that an audience will love—another platitude. I'll grant that it is easier for an audience to love a beautiful girl with a charming personality than it is for it to become enamored of an old man who sells papers on a street corner. But that is an abstract view. If a given story requires it, it is the task of the author to make the old man as lovable as the girl, and if this be accomplished, then the old man must contribute as much as the girl does to the box-office value of the picture. Obviously the more people there are in a picture for the audience to love, the more it will love the picture as a whole. The greater latitude studios are allowed in the selection of their story material, the easier it will be for them to make their selections and the more extensive will be their source of supply. To-day they discard a story because an old man is the principal character in it. If they selected the story and made the old man lovable, it would become one more story that was available and one more picture that had box-office strength.

▼▼ WHAT HOLLYWOOD needs are writers who can put more lovable characters in their scripts and directors who can put them on the screen without sacrificing any of their lovable qualities. And it needs producers who will recognize the box-office wisdom of surrounding the lovable principals with people who can give us definite characterizations, no matter how small the parts that some of them play. I am not arguing in favor of the screen going Pollyanna. I do not ask it to give me to love a simpering grandmother who does nothing but sit with her hands folded. If we are to have a grandmother I want a gay old one, a mischievous old thing, a grandmother who stands out and is somebody. I want my villains villainous,—strong, dynamic scoundrels who register something definite. I want my butlers to be human beings and some policemen to be something besides Irish.

Hollywood is overlooking a valuable box-office asset when it casts its pictures as it is doing now. There is a wealth of good acting talent available. The smallest part can have a real actor for its portrayal. Too much attention is paid to the principals and not enough to the secondary characters and extras. Nine out of ten social functions that are presented on the screen appear as if so many people in dress suits being so close to him had scared the director into forgetting how to direct, and he gives us guests who seem to be as scared as he is. We need human beings on the screen, flesh and blood characters who have the power to interest us in themselves; and we want some whom we can love, not as much for what they do, as for what they are like.

Story Selection

ACCORDING TO *Variety* a number of stories that finally were made into box-office successes, were kicked around all the major studios before their picture possibilities finally were recognized—such stories as *Star Witness*, *Five Star Final*, *Waterloo Bridge*, *Street Scene* and *Bad Girl*. The fact that *Bad Girl* may have made a tour of all the studios before it came to rest at Fox has no significance. If Ben

bad girl made a tour of all the studios

Schulberg refused to buy it for picture purposes it means merely that he did not see a picture in it. It is the same way with the others who rejected it. Finally it came to Frank Borzage who found in it a quality that lent itself to his individual interpretation, and because Winnie Sheehan has confidence in Borzage, he was permitted to treat the story and express it on the screen in his own way and without interference. A great picture resulted.

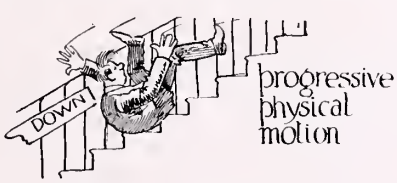
Frank Borzage has turned down scores of stories out of which other directors made good pictures. That again is something that has no general significance. Ben Schulberg has rejected stories out of which Irving Thalberg has made box-office successes, and Irving has turned down material that Ben made highly profitable to his company. If cinematic standards were so set and so mechanical that any producer

could see all the values in *Bad Girl* and any director could realize them on the screen—if such powers of visualization were common to all producers and ability to translate the values into screen language were common to all directors—we could run the entire business with a collection of rubber stamps.

▼▼ If Frank Borzage could see values in *Bad Girl*, and if Winnie Sheehan had confidence in Frank's ability to select his material, it was of no importance if Sheehan could not see the same values. The thing that matters was that the man who could see the picture in the story was the man who was allowed to make it. He shot a script upon which he worked himself and which was written with the single aim of bringing out the qualities that Borzage found in the book. Perhaps there are not many directors who could have taken the script and given us a picture as good as the one that reached the screen under the direction of Frank Borzage, but I think that there are a score who could have made a box-office picture from it—by following the script that Borzage used.

The film industry, for all the years of its existence, has been looking for stories so obvious that anyone could see their picture possibilities. This policy was profitable as long as the screen expressed itself solely in action, for physical energy was something that anyone could recognize when he encountered it in a story. Now, however, that film audiences have grown up and can assimilate some psychology with the diet of action, appropriate stories are harder to find because studio executives who control their selection lack the visual sense to recognize the pictorial possibilities of the psychological twists in a particular story. If he had possessed this visual sense the first executive to whom *Bad Girl* was submitted would have purchased it.

▼▼ It would seem, therefore, that the person of most importance to the film industry just now is he who can visualize the screen values of a story and put them on paper so explicitly that a director of average ability can make a box-office picture from them. We happen to have quite a lot of people



who possess this ability, but not enough people who will allow them to exercise it. In nearly every studio the final say regarding the purchase of story material rests with someone who can not see picture possibilities in an incident unless he has seen the same incident in a dozen pictures that have been successful at the box-office. And he is the kind of man who refuses to be influenced by the enthusiasm of some writer or director working under him.

Since we have had talkies we have had better stories on the screen. The reason for this is that any production executive can understand what is related to him in conversation. A straight narrative that employs one part of progressive physical motion as the story-telling medium to eight parts of dialogue, can be understood by the executive at one reading, consequently it has not been difficult for the real brains in studios to raise the standard of the stories that the public has been getting. It is a sad fact, however, that the public has not reacted favorably to these better stories. It has demonstrated in a manner that surely Hollywood can grasp by this time, that it wants motion pictures, not stories as such, and in making the demonstration it has upheld the contention of the *Spectator* that the story is not important. The box-office value of a given story when it is presented on the screen is not what the audience must listen to. It is what the audience can see. To the man who *can see* a story in pictures as he reads it the task of selecting story material must be assigned before box-office prosperity can be restored.

▼▼ Some weeks ago I argued at length in the *Spectator* that the industry would not be successful financially until it ceased buying stories as such and bought only motion pictures on paper—until it bought scripts in which the story values were developed in visual terms. Box-office conditions prove conclusively that our production executives are much better at selecting stories than they are at selecting motion pictures. Even a story from which a successful picture could be made is of no value to a studio unless there is someone on the payroll who can recognize the picture possibilities and who has the authority to assign the picture for production. Each of the big organizations has hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in stories that have possibilities which those in authority can not recognize.

The other day a director with a good box-office record told me that for three years he has been itching to do a story which his company owns. As soon as he finishes one picture, he digs up this story and again asks to be permitted to make a picture from it, but each time he is told by his production chief that there is no picture in it. The director, the man whose business is to make pictures, can *see* one in this story, and the executive, who can grasp only the story incidents as incidents and not for their psychological significance, tells him in effect that he can't see a picture in it. It is an absurd situation. Hollywood never will get anywhere until it permits those who can *see* pictures in stories to buy its story material.

Of course I don't want Paramount to disband its committee of advertising men and press agents that sits in New York and selects material for the Hollywood studio. During the present box-office depression it is very kind of Paramount to supply some comedy relief, and the fact that the lack of quality in the pictures costs its stockholders many millions of dollars each year is something that does not concern the rest of us.

Let Him Go It Alone

Any art creation approaches perfection in the degree that technical skill is employed in the expression of its creator's idea. An art form is the tool an artist employs to express physically something that his imagination has conceived. The starting point always must be the idea that is to be expressed and the father of the idea naturally is the one who can give it its best expression. Screen art is failing to hold its

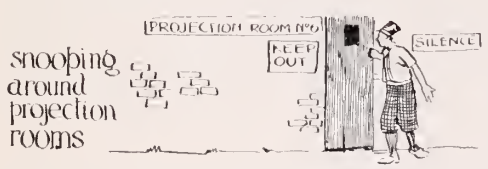
audience because it disregards these obvious truths. Only once in a blue moon do we have a motion picture that expresses the mind that conceived the idea in it. A few directors are permitted to express themselves. They do not always give us box-office pictures, but they never fail to give us interesting ones.

The *Spectator* has maintained consistently that the road back to motion picture prosperity lies in the direction of unit production. At present individual brains are not allowed free expression. In the case of Paramount, not even the studio is allowed free expression. The situation there is interesting. I have the utmost respect for a man who can accomplish as much in a few brief years as Adolph Zukor has accomplished since he became head of Paramount, but at times he bewilders me by his method of doing things.

▼▼ B. P. SCHULBERG was placed in charge of Paramount production about the time the *Spectator* came into being, about the time that I began to notice actively what was going on in film circles. The old studio on Vine Street had been turning out such poor stuff that Paramount rated fifth place among the producing organizations when sized up from the box-office angle. The product was so poor, in fact, that home-office officials washed their hands of it; they refused to come to Hollywood, and they disclaimed all responsibility for what went on here.

It wasn't so very long before Paramount was in its new studio, with all the dead wood cut out of the personnel, and with an output that gave it first place among the producing organizations. Ben Schulberg, in an amazingly short time, brought back box-office prosperity to his company and created wholly by himself the greatest asset Paramount could acquire—an enthusiastic and capable producing unit that possessed a feeling of great loyalty to the man who had created it and who continued to guide it.

The people in the home office who had refused to accept any of the responsibility for the old poor product, were not



slow in displaying a proprietary interest in the new good product. Visits of New York officials to the Hollywood studio became more frequent. The smooth working of the Schulberg organization was disturbed by newspaper gossip of impending changes until no one in the studio was sure of his job, and the *esprit de corps* which had kept the organization at the peak of its efficiency began to lessen. The inevitable result was a lowering of quality in the product.

▼▼ I AM NOT ON confidential terms with Ben Schulberg and do not know what he thought of the turmoil following the advent of the sound camera, but as far as the record shows, he just kept digging away, continued to be the most popular production chief ever to preside over a Hollywood studio, and gradually restored the quality of Paramount production. I've been snooping around Paramount projection rooms lately and have seen some of the new product. It has convinced me that if Paramount would leave Ben alone he would make its stockholders happy.

But Paramount won't leave him alone. Adolph Zukor has conceived the weirdest idea that pictures have to their credit—the existence in New York of a committee, composed of people who know nothing about production, to pass on story material out of which pictures are to be made three thousand miles away from the committee's base of operation. In previous *Spectators* I have referred to this committee. I can't leave it alone. It's so crazy that it fascinates me.

Home office officials come out here, fuss around for a week or two, tell Ben Schulberg exactly what he should do, and go back to the home office. How he managed to stand it, I can't imagine. I'm surprised that he should. I think that if I were in his place I'd make a trip to the home office myself, tell it what I thought of it and advise it to get some other messenger boy to make its pictures.

▼▼ WHEN I STARTED this article I thought it was going to be a learned discourse on the box-office value of free expression in screen art. Perhaps it is. Certainly if Paramount expects to get box-office product from Hollywood it must allow Ben Schulberg to go it alone. The idea of placing some home office official over him is so absurd it is a wonder that even the Paramount bankers do not realize it and insist that the Hollywood studio be given a free hand in working out its own problems.

Schulberg pulled Paramount out of a hole a few years ago. At that time he worked without interference. If Adolph Zukor has an ounce of sense he will see that Ben be given an opportunity to pull the company out of the hole it is in at present. The method is simple—no interference from New York.

Paramount's greatest intangible asset at the present moment is the feeling of loyalty the personnel of the Hollywood studio has for B. P. Schulberg. That is something for Mr. Zukor to take into account. It also has some bearing upon the problems Paramount bankers have to work out.

Acting and Naturalness

EDWIN SCHALLERT, whose comments in the *Los Angeles Times* provide me with so many topics for my own comments, recently had a discussion with a correspondent regarding naturalness in acting. Apparently they agree that we don't want actors to be natural. They do not believe in an actor "just being himself." Schallert's own comment is that we have had much bad acting because the actors were trying to be natural.

I agree with both of them that we do not want to see an actor "just being himself," but I do not agree that bad acting results from an actor trying to be natural. What I think both Schallert and his correspondent overlook is the fact that actors play roles, not themselves. To give good performances they must lose themselves so thoroughly in their characterizations that they become the characters they play, and the measure of their success is the perfection they achieve in making the characters natural. No one asks an actor to be natural, but we do ask him to make his characterizations

natural. The *Times*' discussion, as a matter of fact, appears to me as being rather silly.

▼▼ SOMEWHERE ELSE I READ a discussion of the question: "Do screen audiences want acting?" The writer answered in the negative, and to support his case cited several pictures which contained good acting, but which were flops. I do not agree with him. Screen audiences want acting, but they do not want to be aware that they are getting it. When Warner Oland plays the murderous *Fu Manchu*, the audience wants to think it is looking at the murderer, not

at an actor. Oland achieves success in the role because he acts it so vividly that we are not conscious that he is acting.

Personality and acting as box-office assets should not be confused. Being lulled into a benevolent mood by the purring of Charles, our huge black cat, upon whose back my writing pad rests as he lies curled in my lap, I will not refer to any of them by name, but there are several box-office favorites whose popularity is due entirely to the appeal of their personalities, and not at all to their acting ability, of which they have none. They are the stars who twinkle briefly. The fixed stars are those who can act. If it is the charm of her youthful personality, and nothing else, that gives a girl her audience appeal, manifestly the appeal can not outlive her youth. If she adds acting ability to her youthful charm, the former will carry her along indefinitely after the latter is outgrown.

▼▼ A CHARMING personality is a valuable asset to a player who can act, for it commands the immediate attention of an audience and offers some compensation when the player has a poor role. Claudette Colbert charmed me the first moment I saw her on the screen, but it is her acting skill that has kept her her place among my favorites. She combines charm and ability. Wally Beery, on the other hand, holds me with his acting. I don't drink, but if I did, I don't think I could get drunk enough to think that he's charming.

Writers and Directors

DALTON TRUMBO took me to task in the last *Spectator* because of my contention that in providing screen entertainment the story is not as important as the treatment accorded it. He thinks that I do not give writers credit for all they contribute to a picture, and that I give directors far too much credit. If it was Dalton's ambition to tease me into verbal combat, I am sorry to disappoint him. I agree with him fully. I have read over my article which prompted his comment and I can see how he was justified in answering it as he did. But I did not make myself as clear as I might.

In saying that a picture is more dependent upon the direction given it than upon the inherent strength of the story, I did not mean to minimize the importance of the writer's contribution to it. I am aware that many scripts contain such explicit suggestions to the director that the scenarists are entitled to most of the credit for whatever degree of success the pictures made from them achieve. That, however, in no way affects my contention that the direction is more important than the story.

▼▼ BY DIRECTION I do not mean only what is contributed by the director. If a script is followed exactly and the picture reaches the screen precisely as it was conceived in the brain of the scenarist, then the scenarist is entitled to the credit for the direction and the director only to the credit for his interpretation. I use the word in its broadest sense. It means both the direction written into the script and that supplied by the director on the set. In writing my reviews I have no way of distinguishing between the two, and, like all other reviewers, I have fallen into the habit of attributing all of it to the director.

Trumbo cites my reviews of *Bad Girl* and *Transatlantic*, in which I give all the credit to Borzage and Howard, their respective directors. In these instances I think I am justified. In their various productions these directors have shot from the scripts of many different scenarists, but always the quality of their pictures attains about the same high level. This would indicate that the uniformity in the quality must be theirs, not the writers'. And another thing—most of the pictures have a lot of writers, but each has but one director. To whom am I going to give credit for *Susan Lenox*, assum-

ing that it is to be a success? Apparently several thousand writers have had their fingers in it.

If at their next conference with producers the writers will figure out a plan by which reviewers can be guided into giving them all the credit due them for their contribution to pictures, no one will accept it with more joyous zest than I will.

Doctors

ONE OF OUR most prominent screen stars dropped into the chair beside me in a studio restaurant and asked me why I did not write something about the exorbitant fees charged by doctors who attend picture people who are reputed to draw large salaries "Look at this bill!" he exclaimed as he drew it from his pocket. "I had nothing but a bad cold, but I wanted to get rid of it quickly as my picture was going into production, so I consulted him. I forget how many times I saw him, but I know that twenty-five dollars would be big pay for what he did. And I get a bill for ninety dollars!" Then he told me of being charged eighteen hundred dollars for an operation on his wife.

Among modern rackets there are few that compare with the practice of medicine when regarded merely from the finan-

cial angle. It has been commercialized to an extent that outrages the ethics of the profession as they were established by the honest general practitioners who used to attend to all our ailments. The only ambition of the old doctor was to cure us. That of most of the modern doctors is to get our last dollar, and to them the curing is incidental. On this subject I am qualified to speak. For nearly five years I have been struggling under a load of doctors' bills that makes me feel at times that I am working solely for medical men. I will relate one instance.

▼▼ DURING THE illness of my late son I was advised to consult Dr. H. P. Jacobson, 2007 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, who, I was told, was a specialist in the illness from which my boy was suffering. From the beginning of his connection with the case the impression that I received was that Jacobson's enthusiasm for money was greater than his eagerness to benefit his patient, but I was a layman who knew nothing about the medical aspect of the case, and was in no position to make a protest. Every two weeks for months I paid him one hundred dollars, and if I ever was a day late, he called me up or wrote me a letter demanding immediate payment. Once when I protested that my earnings were small he told me that I should send my boy to a charity hospital. I can not write of the brutality of Jacobson's treatment of the patient.

I still am making monthly payments to Jacobson for services that other doctors whom I consulted later characterized as "damnable." The courts maintain that doctors' bills must be paid. Again if I am a day late with a payment I am threatened by Jacobson with rigid court action. I have appealed to I. Lindenbaum, Jacobson's attorney, who told me that it was his client's intention to harass me in every way, to embarrass me to the full extent of the law's capacity, if I did not make my payments regularly. The attorney said that he could do nothing to make it easier, that his client dictated the rigid plan to force me to keep up the payments. And for all the money I have paid him, Jacobson gave nothing of value. I am convinced that he was ignorant of the nature of my son's illness; I know he did him no good, and feel that his only interest in the case was the opportunity it gave him to extort money from me.

But what is the layman going to do? The only cure for the evil is for the state to take care of the health of its citizens, as it does of that of its cattle.

Spectator as a Monthly

THE DECISION that the *Spectator* should become a monthly was made at the corner of Beverly Boulevard and La Brea. I was halted by a traffic signal; I had to think of something, and I thought of that. It was just after the last *Spectator* went on the press, consequently I had no way of giving our readers any advance warning.

The reason for the change is purely material. For nearly six years I have been haunted by printers' bills. Every two weeks one came in. As I approached the corner of Beverly and La Brea I was enjoying my regular semi-monthly worry about the printer—and the great idea came to me: If I had only one bill a month to worry about, I could worry about it for the usual two weeks and have the rest of the month to devote to worrying about something else.

The more I thought of the idea, the more I liked it. As a matter of fact, the *Spectator* always should have been a monthly. The time element does not enter into the discussions that are carried in its columns, and its contents are essentially of the nature found in monthly journals. I feel that the film industry and screen art should have one upstanding, frank and fearless monthly devoted to enlightened discussion of the making of motion pictures and the elements of which they are composed, and that is the kind of publication I hope the *Spectator* will become.

▼▼ IT IS THE INTENTION of my associates and me to give our readers in one monthly edition as much to read as they previously got in two semi-monthly editions. For some time the question of picture reviews perplexed me. I do not like to view a picture until it is in final form, consequently I do not attend previews, and pictures are shown in studios only a short time before they are released, which makes it a hard job to give the readers of a monthly *Spectator* advance information on the new offerings. I came to the conclusion afresh that the time element was not a matter of great importance. We will try to be as up to date as possible, though perhaps the fact that you have seen the pictures of which we write will make the reviews even more interesting.

After a while, when the depression rolls over and becomes a hump, you may again get the *Spectator* every two weeks. I often pass the corner of Beverly and La Brea.

Some Difference

ONE OF THE finest pictures the talking screen has to its credit—*Devotion*—ran at the Carthay Circle for four weeks. One of the finest silent pictures ever made—*Seventh Heaven*—ran at the same house for twenty-two weeks.

The longest run of a silent picture locally was that of *The Covered Wagon* at the Egyptian—thirty-four weeks. The longest run of a talking picture at the Carthay Circle was that of *They Had to See Paris*—ten weeks.

During the five years that the Egyptian ran continuously under the management of Sid Grauman, it showed twelve silent pictures. The average run was nineteen and one-half weeks. Talking pictures started at the peak of their popularity. The first ten to be shown at the Carthay Circle averaged six weeks, five days. Since then their popularity has been on the wane until a four weeks run has become the average.

The average run of all the silent pictures shown at the same house was fourteen weeks.

▼▼ THE FIRST TEN talking pictures shown at the Carthay Circle, those that had the longest runs, ran for a total of sixty-four weeks. Three silent pictures, *What Price Glory?*, *Seventh Heaven* and *Volga Boatman*, had a total run of the same number of weeks.

To put it in another way, the film industry had to make three silent pictures to keep the house operating for sixty-four weeks, and it had to make ten all-talkies to keep it operating

for the same length of time when all-talkies were at the height of their popularity. To-day it has to make sixteen talkies to keep the house open as long as three silents kept it open.

Twelve silents kept the Egyptian running for five years. It would take sixty-five talkies, each running as long as *Devotion* ran at the Carthay Circle, to keep a house open as long.

There is some significance in these records. They demonstrate to my satisfaction that as a box-office asset the talking picture is just what I said three years ago it would be—a hopeless failure. Perhaps you can get some other meaning out of the figures.

Retakes

EVERY TIME one criticises adversely the fool system of perfecting a picture by a series of retakes, the producer comes back with the argument that a stage play always is perfected by a series of trial performances, that it is changed a great deal until its final form is set. This is offered as an excuse for a studio's failure to prepare a script that can be shot as written and result in a satisfactory picture that can not be improved by retakes. It is a poor argument. There is nothing final about the first performance of a stage play. It still is plastic. Changes can be made as the performances continue, and they cost the producer nothing. There is no reason why he should exercise great care in putting his script in final form before the play is presented to the public. He even can make money while he is polishing it.

▼▼ WITH A MOTION picture it is different. Retakes cost a great deal of money. A stage producer takes his play to Providence and discovers that the audience laughs in the wrong place. Next morning, in an hour's time and not at the expense of one cent, he can rehearse the company and remedy the evil. A picture producer takes his picture to Santa Monica and discovers that the audience laughs in the wrong place. He reassembles cast, cameramen, electricians, grips, carpenters, prop men, extras, perhaps an orchestra; he re-shoots the sequence, which means the further expense of film, laboratory work, editing and cutting. I would not be surprised if the cost to Metro of the retakes on *Susan Lenox* amounted to a quarter of a million dollars.

Perhaps you will ask how production executives can know in advance how an audience will receive a picture. Well, they draw enormous salaries for knowing something. Isn't that it?

Filmic Motion

THERE SHOULD be nothing in a picture to check the filmic flow. I've written that several times, yet in conversations with writers I find that there are many who do not know what it means, who think it refers to physical action. A good example of what I mean is presented in *Twenty-Four Hours*, a Paramount picture. In forcing a door to a room in which his mistress was murdered, Clive Brook breaks his arm. For the rest of the picture the broken arm is before us as a story element. When Brook is being given the third degree, we see him holding the injured arm and we know he is in pain. At a time when we should be giving our whole and undivided attention to the story, we are forced to give consideration to something that has nothing whatever to do with the story, for not even remotely does the fact that Brook breaks his arm affect a single story incident. That is a perfect example of the interruption of the flow of filmic motion.

Filmic motion, as a matter of fact, is the motion picture itself. Obviously a picture's drawing power is its power to hold our unwavering attention. If we sit with our eyes glued on the screen and never for an instant think of anything other than the picture's headlong rush towards the solution of the problem presented in its premise, it to us is a good motion picture. It can't be anything else. When I write of filmic motion or visual flow I am dealing with the only element that decides a picture's fate at the box-office, yet perhaps twenty producers and associate producers during the past month have advised me to forget my "arty" ideas about films and regard them purely from the business angle. The film industry's business is to sell filmic motion to the public, yet Paramount breaks Clive Brook's arm in the middle of a picture and damages the one element that must be undamaged if the picture is to be wholly successful.

Sam Taylor Does Well

YOU MAY underline *Skyline* as another feather in the cap of Winfield Sheehan, who is proving singularly successful in putting box-office back into Fox product. Also you may regard it as another argument in favor of unit production for, like *Transatlantic*, *Bad Girl* and *Merely Mary Ann*, all box-office successes, it is a picture made by a director who was given a free hand in its creation. True, Kenyon Nicholson and Dudley Nichols are credited with the screen play and dialogue, but I happen to know that Sam Taylor, the director of *Skyline*, never begins to shoot a picture until he has put in enough time on the scenario to get it into just the shape that he wants.

Sam Taylor

I am accused by writers of not giving them in my reviews the credit due them for their contributions to pictures. Without in any way trying to minimize the value of the work done by Nicholson and Nichols in preparing the script of *Skyline*, I have no hesitancy in giving Sam Taylor practically all the credit for the excellence of the picture as I feel sure that all the writers did was to put on paper ideas that first were approved by him. This, it appears to me, would make the picture the individual creation of the director, which is what we mean when we talk of unit production. For the creation as a whole, therefore, we are to credit the director, and for the individual features that were molded by him into the completed whole, we must credit the able craftsmen whose services he directed.

▼▼ THE STORY is not the strongest feature of *Skyline*. It is rather hard to believe. It contains several situations that are purely mechanical and without psychological reasons for being included, and it nearly kills Tommy Meighan for no

reason at all. The story of any picture, however, is not of first importance, as I have said quite often. The four Fox successes which I mention in this review demonstrate the truth of this contention, for none of them has a story with any real substance to it.

What makes *Skyline* good screen entertainment is its treatment. It has four outstanding qualities—the intelligent direction given it by Taylor, the extraordinary settings provided by the art director, Duncan Cramer; superb camera work by John Mescal, and an outstanding performance by Hardie Albright. Cramer provided a background that has entertainment value of its own, and Mescal photographed it in a manner that realized all the value. The story deals with the building of skyscrapers, and by means of the most amazing process shots that I yet have seen, we are taken up the insides of great steel skeletons and look down on hurrying throngs forty or fifty stories below, and shiver as we did when we first saw Harold Lloyd do the same thing.

▼▼ ACROSS THE vibrant, throbbing industrial background which the camera brings to us, human characters draw a story that has little merit purely as a narrative, but which afforded Sam Taylor sufficient excuse for the making of a really excellent motion picture that should please any audience. Albright is almost the whole story. He is going to prove a valuable addition to the Fox pay-roll. His role is not the usual conventional one that falls to the lot of the leading man. It is a meaty part that provides him with many opportunities to prove that he can act, and he takes advantage of all of them with vigor, intelligence and skill. Meighan gives us a most ingratiating performance that brings his pleasing personality to the fore.

Opposite Albright is the delicious Maureen O'Sullivan, one of my true screen loves. She leaned over my shoulder when the fade-out came and whispered in my ear, "I think I'm simply terrible," and I believe she meant it. But she's not. She's both splendid and charming. Some day I'm going to write a motion picture for Maureen and blackmail Winnie Sheehan into buying it. Perhaps it was to explain her winsome brogue that her father was made an Irishman. But whatever the reason was, we should be grateful for having such a delightful Irishman as Jack Kennedy proves to be. Stanley Fields is on the screen only for one brief sequence, but he gives us a bit that is vivid. Robert McWade also contributes one of those substantial and intelligent performances that make him prominent in all his pictures.

The associate producer of *Skyline* was John W. Considine, Jr. It gives him high rating. But he was the associate producer of *Wicked* also. That makes him about even.

Connie and a Nose

CONSTANCE BENNETT has succeeded in giving a performance that leaves me completely satisfied. I didn't think she could do it. In all her previous screen appearances there was a snooty quality in her characterizations that made me want to stick my tongue out at her just to see what she would do under such an unusual circumstance. I have seen her screen self in deep misery on many occasions and never once did I care a tinker's damn about it. Of course, I admired her as something to look at, and I had a certain admiration for the mechanical skill she brought to bear in revealing her emotions, but when she got into trouble she could stay there and I would not lift my little finger to fish her out. When her little sister, Joan, suffered agonies, I suffered with her, but Connie—not on your life!

Archie Mayo

Then *Bought* came to a neighborhood theatre which has a blonde ticket-selling miss who is so intelligent that she reads the *Spectator* regularly. She cissed at me as I was passing her cage bound for some other place, and through the hole in the glass fence that keeps her customers from grabbing her, she told me that I would just love Connie if I went inside and saw *Bought*, which wasn't as dirty as its name would imply. I went inside, and when I came out I reached through the hole and shook hands with the blonde. She's a nice girl.

▼▼ ARCHIE MAYO, large, complacent and competent, directed *Bought*, and perhaps he is entitled to the credit for giving us a Connie who is natural, human and likable. To her own credit stands a thoroughly intelligent and appealing performance that kept me deeply interested in what was happening to her, and made me pull for her every time things looked bad. Towards the end, when she comes to the door and says to Ben Lyon, "My father wants to see you," I got that emotional kick that I rely upon to tell me if a performance is good. About one more characterization like that from Connie, and Joan will have to share some of my fatherly affection with her big sister. I have so many screen loves that I can spare only so much affection to any one family. Anyway, I am sorry that I thought Connie snooty, I agree with her that *Bought* is her most interesting picture, and I hope she will be given other opportunities to be as human and as likable.

Skipping lightly over the good story, intelligent direction, the fine production supplied by Warner Brothers, and the splendid performance of Ben Lyon, we come to Connie's father's nose. I read a lot about that nose in the reviews of *Bought*, and from them received the impression that its bulk was due to the mechanical skill of a Warner make-up artist and was not an act of God. If I am wrong about this,

if the nose started even with Mr. Bennett and grew more enthusiastically than the rest of him, I humbly beg his pardon for referring to it, but I think I am safe, as I have seen him before and can't remember the nose, and it is not the kind of nose one is apt to forget.

▼▼ I HAVE SAID many times in the *Spectator* that there should be nothing in a picture to interrupt the flow of story interest. I have referred to "comedy relief," to weird sets, to various things that retard the visual progression of the story by introducing an alien element for our consideration, but I never listed a nose as one of the things that should be avoided. Richard Bennett is an admirable actor, and in *Bought* gives a deeply appealing performance of a part in which his appearance was a brilliant bit of casting, but to me some of the value of his work was lost because of the fact that his nose forced itself continually upon my attention and had to be considered at a time when all my consideration should have been devoted to what was going on.

The perfect motion picture, which I by no means despair of seeing some day for I am a confirmed cinema optimist, must be one that offers nothing to distract our attention from the main thread of the story. The Bennett nose no doubt was intended to give strength to his characterization, but it had exactly the opposite effect in that the value of the characterization was weakened to the extent that our attention was diverted to the actor's unusually prominent feature.

Lively Madge, et al

ANYONE WHO appreciates fine screen acting will find much in *Guilty Hands* to enjoy. Lionel Barrymore's performance is brilliant and in itself more than atones for the weaknesses of the story. He makes every scene in which he appears a cinematic gem that almost brought me to the point of indulging in audible applause. Never before have we had on the screen such a delightful murderer. The keen intelligence that underlies his acting at all times is apparent, and it will take only a few more such exhibitions of his skill to establish him as one of the screen's foremost box-office favorites. Madge Evans, the talented little miss who contributed so much to the success of *Sporting Blood*, scores another triumph in *Guilty Hands*, in which she has a wider scope for her ability. Billy Bakewell, the talented juvenile who is coming along so rapidly, gives us another of his fine performances, and Kay Francis adds one more to her long series of successful appearances. In this picture she has a difficult role, but proves equal to it.

W. S. Van Dyke

Guilty Hands has that always intriguing theme, the commission of the perfect crime. Barrymore's murder is perfect both in conception and execution. True, Miss Francis fixes the crime on its perpetrator, but she never could have done it without the help of Bayard Veiller, who wrote the story and knew who the guilty man was. Her discovery of the part played by a phonograph in establishing an alibi for Barrymore was manufactured by the author. It is not reasonable to suppose that it would have occurred to the most expert detective, much less to a girl with no experience in crime detection. And even then it proved nothing, as no evidence could have been presented to prove that Barrymore had made use of the phonograph to perfect his alibi. Evidence that a man could have done a certain thing is no proof of the fact that he did it.

▼▼ W. S. VAN DYKE'S direction adds to my growing conviction that soon he will be recognized as one of our few really great directors. He has a keen sense of composition as an aid to drama, is as competent in handling gay scenes as he is at giving dramatic emphasis to the grave ones, and realizes the importance of keeping his story moving. Metro gave the picture a production that is rich in pictorial values and Cedric Gibbons, the art director, is to be commended for the beauty and good taste reflected in the settings.

While viewing *Guilty Hands* I recalled something I once wrote in the *Spectator:* that there are no little things in a motion picture. Glycerine tears are little things in themselves, but they become big when they are instrumental in nullifying a characterization. Kay Francis plays a young woman who loves Alan Mowbray, and when he is murdered she starts on a determined and relentless hunt for the murderer. She fastens the crime on Barrymore, and one of the most powerful scenes in the picture is that in which he threatens her with dire happenings if she reveals what she knows. To be consistent with her characterization up to that point, Miss Francis should have been the cold, unrelenting and determined woman with the

single idea of avenging the slaying of her lover. But some genius on the set filled her eyes with glycerine which glittered on her cheeks and made her look like a cry-baby.

Misses Fire

PRESUMING Paramount's purpose in making *My Sin* was a gesture on its part to relieve in some measure the prevailing box-office slump, I am afraid its efforts will prove unavailing. In the rampant talkie days it might have got by, but to-day when the public prefers seeing its pictures to listening to them, there is nothing in it to justify its making. It comes from the Long Island studios, was directed by George Abbott, and stars jointly Tallulah Bankhead and Fredric March. The rest of the cast is composed of people who are unknown to screen audiences. What puzzles me about the production is how Paramount could have imagined that it had even a slight chance of success.

George Abbott

If Frank Borzage can take a trivial story of two unknown players and give us such a smashing box-office success as *Bad Girl* is proving to be, Abbott can not blame the failure of his picture on the poor story and the fact that some of his players are unknown. He had more to start with than Borzage had. There is more story in every reel of *My Sin* than there is in all of *Bad Girl;* Fredric March is well established as a favorite and Miss Bankhead has been exploited widely. But it is all to no avail because it fairly reeks of the theatre, because in the writing of the scenario and in the manner of its direction there is nothing that suggests the screen. There is not a scene in it that will earn the sympathy of an audience.

▼▼ SUCH SCREEN entertainment as *My Sin* presents is as definitely out of date as side-whiskers. For a year or more the box-office has been pounding home that truth, and the producing organizations proceed blithely to ignore it and to blame poor receipts on the prevailing depression. Occasionally Paramount gives us something human like *Tom Sawyer* and *Skippy*, which the public patronizes liberally, and then it goes ahead with a lot of other productions that it should know in advance the public will refuse to patronize. When I wrote three years ago that producers were foolish in going over wholly to talkies, I can understand my failure to impress them, as box-office conditions then seemed to prove me wrong, but it is quite beyond my ability to understand why they continue to turn them out now that the box-office is doing its best to impress upon them how foolish it is.

In *My Sin* uninteresting people say uninteresting things endlessly. There is a dinner sequence that might have been directed by the rawest amateur. The characters express opinions that we feel at once are not theirs but which they must express solely to keep the story from coming to a full stop. March gives an excellent performance, but Miss Bankhead, who fascinated me in the only other picture in which I have seen her, bored me in this one. And I don't see why in the closing sequences she dressed and made up to resemble an eagle.

Reckless Living

APPARENTLY Junior Laemmle thought he needed a mental holiday. He has given us quite a procession of excellent pictures that could have been the product only of real picture intelligence, and now he gives us *Reckless Living* which is weak, cheap, trashy, dull and a few other things that adjectives can express when they wish to be uncomplimentary. I don't know how much merit there may have been in the play, *On the Up and Up*, but if there happened to be any, Courtenay Terrett, Richard Schayer and Tom Reed failed to find it and put it into the script which Cyril Gardner shot.

Cyril Gardner

Mae Clarke and Norman Foster are a young married couple, who are so anxious to get along in some respectable business that they open a speakeasy to earn the capital necessary to make them respectable. Their ultimate ambition is to own a gas station in New Jersey. Every few feet in the picture the line is repeated—"The gas station in New Jersey"—until it becomes ludicrous. No picture intelligence whatever was displayed in the writing of the script from which the picture was shot. The camera plays no part in telling the story, everything being put over in dialogue which is commonplace and uninteresting. Gardner's direction made a bad job worse—although in his defense I must say that no

one on earth could have made a wholly acceptable picture from the material which was handed to him.

▼▼ THE MOST stupid thing about *Reckless Living* is the fact that it was made. Talkies so far above it in merit that they can not be compared, are flopping all over the country. Good stories told in clever dialogue are not returning their production cost, and here we have a dull story told in poor dialogue. It is too bad that Junior made it. I think he should place it gently on a shelf and charge it off to the maintenance of his reputation as an intelligent producer.

So Unnecessary

THE FIRST thing you will notice in *Twenty-Four Hours* is the frankness with which Kay Francis and Clive Brook discuss their marital misunderstandings. We discover them in a drawing room where the after-dinner liqueur is being served to the guests. Kay and Clive are married; they sit six or eight feet from one another, and discuss the most intimate details of their life together. It is all right for a husband and wife to try to patch up differences in a neutral drawing room in which they are guests, but generally it is done in tones that do not fill the whole room. In this picture no effort whatever is made to suggest that there is anything intimate in the discussion. The two are picked out in a close shot; there is no hum of voices as the other guests carry on conversations, and we listen to Kay confess an indiscretion and Brook speculate on his chances of getting very drunk. And because we can not see the other guests when the camera moves up to the two, we are supposed to consider that they suddenly have died or have become deaf. It is picture-making at the crudest manifestation of its mental ineptitude.

Marion Gering

▼▼ PERHAPS IF THIS assault upon my intelligence had not come in the opening sequence, I would not have viewed all of *Twenty-Four Hours* quite so critically. Any picture, of course, must be considered good until it does something itself to prove that it is otherwise. It is seldom that this indiscretion is committed in the opening seqence. It, however, only anticipates the decision we are going to reach later. This Paramount offering, directed by Marion Gering and featuring Clive Brook, Kay Francis, Regis Toomey and Miriam Hopkins, is a drab and weirdly written social drama that will please no one. Toomey chokes his wife to death while Brook, whose mistress the wife has become, lies drunk in an adjoining room. That is the kind of ugly and depressing entertainment Paramount is offering in these depressing days.

I am not sure what the story is about, an uncertainty which apparently I share with Louis Weitzenkorn, who wrote the screen play. I thought it had to do with the married life of Kay and Clive, but my doubts came when I viewed the elaborate manner in which the shooting of Toomey was staged. Only the fact that the story was about him would justify the footage devoted to his demise, but I could not see what connection the shooting had with anything else. The whole picture impresses one as being so unnecessary.

I must admit, however, that it is one of the most efficiently produced and best acted pictures that Paramount has turned out lately.

Cummings and Baxter

WHEN YOU SET out to view a picture directed by Irving Cummings you can feel pretty sure that you are going to enjoy some gorgeous photographic treats. It is strange to me that more producers and directors do not grasp the commercial value of the esthetic pictorial quality that can be made a part of a film creation. Of course, very few directors and still fewer producers have any sense of composition or photography, but many cameramen have, and the box-office would be the gainer if they were allowed to exercise it. *The Cisco Kid*, a Fox picture directed by Cummings, opens with some of the most glorious shots ever screened, sensitive etchings of the moods of the desert done with superb artistry by the camera of Barney McGill. That they have box-office value was evidenced by the audible gasps of appreciation that came from the audience.

Irving Cummings

The picture brings back to us Warner Baxter in the role in which he so brilliantly burst upon us when we first dis-

covered him. Even if we are not to see him in *The Dove*, he remains the "best damn' caballero" we have. Again he is the rollicking dare-devil, handsome as they make 'em, with a lively appreciation of feminine beauty, a heart of gold and a spontaneous sense of humor. Fox should keep him in such picturesque romantic parts. There are lots of others available for the sophisticated roles that he has played. One can picture Warner as a swashbuckling rogue with a ready sword and a gay smile, cutting his way through an army of men to rescue some dumbfounded princess.

▼▼ EDDIE LOWE does well in *Cisco Kid* as the sargeant assigned to the job of catching the bad man. James Bradbury, Jr., Jack Dillon and Charles Stevens also have capable characterizations to their credit, Conchita Montenegro and Nora Lane supply the feminine touch. Conchita is clever and I think we are going to hear from her. Nora has a charming screen personality. We should see her oftener.

Irving Cummings directed the picture in a manner that derived the utmost values from a story that suffered from the fact that it was manufactured solely to bring back to us a character we would be glad to see again. Al Cohn deserves credit for the writing job even though at times he reveals what tough going it was to spin the thing out to feature length. There are several unnecessary dialogue passages that serve only to retard the action. But despite this handicap Cummings' direction keeps it moving in a manner that makes it first class entertainment. It is another of the good pictures we are learning to expect from Fox again.

Interesting

EVEN IF IT does not do well at the box-office Universal has no reason to be ashamed of *Heaven on Earth*. It permits some cinematic sins, but we can excuse that because of the glimpse it gives us of a new locale and the cross section it presents of a life that I did not know existed—that of the shanty-dwellers along the banks of the Mississippi river. I doubt if it will be a great box-office success as it is not so much screen entertainment of the popular sort as it is a really creditable study of the life and manners of a race of people who elect to live lives so different from ours that it is hard for us to muster up a lively interest in what they do.

Russell Mack

The background of the picture is one of glamorous unloveliness. The shanty people, obviously uncouth and apparently uneducated, live in wretched structures tethered along the muddy banks of the river. They rather fascinated me and I became more interested in them for what they were rather than for what they did. I regarded them as biological specimens and the picture as a scientific treatise, something that Universal undoubtedly achieved while it was struggling to make a motion picture designed only for entertainment and not a study of some neighbors of whose existence most of us were unaware. Everything looked authentic and consequently I found the picture engrossing. Russell Mack's direction is to be commended.

▼▼ HEAVEN ON EARTH is rich in scenic value and has several excellent performances to its credit. Lew Ayres is coming along rapidly as a sincere and intelligent young actor. With each of his performances he intrigues me more. Elizabeth Patterson contributes an excellent characterization, her matured technic combined with an intelligent grasp of the possibilities of her part, resulting in one of the best performances I have seen recently. Harry Beresford also does splendidly. Anita Louise makes a pretty heroine, but still is too inexperienced to be wholly satisfactory. Many smaller parts were handled in a capable manner.

The picture is a departure from the usual screen routine and was a rather brave thing for Junior Laemmle to attempt. I see that all the other reviewers attribute few virtues to it, but they judge it by accepted standards. I regard it as something rather odd, and as such I overlook the weaknesses that are revealed when we apply cinematic standards to it.

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▼▼ JUST WHY I did it, I don't know, but I read *The Private Life of Greta Garbo* all the way through. It was written by Rilla Page Palmborg and published by Doubleday, Doran and Company. I never have been curious about what Miss Garbo eats for breakfast or at what hour she goes to bed at night, but I found myself turning page after page that was loaded with precise information on such tremendously important matters. In the fore part of the book, Mrs. Palmborg

is not credited with having written anything else, which makes me suspect that she is the Sigrid of the book and that a ghost writer with considerable literary skill fashioned her information for the pages of the book. We are presented with a servant's eye-view of the great Garbo, with occasional revelations by John Loder, who from the vantage point of friendship with her, was able to supply some intimate details. The queer thing about it is that I am not at all interested in the personal side of Greta Garbo's life, but I found myself reading all this back-stairs gossip and deriving entertainment from it. I suppose you would enjoy it too.

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▼▼ THE SPECTATOR will have to get itself a sporting editor if the studios are going to turn out many more pictures like *The Spirit of Notre Dame*. It should be reviewed by a sports writer. It is not a motion picture. It is football from one end to the other, cluttered up here and there with ragged and isolated fragments of what apparently was intended as a story. It is one of the noisiest films I have seen recently. Even in the intimate scenes the characters shout at one another loudly enough to be heard all over the place. But *The Spirit of Notre Dame* is box-office entertainment. As it will be shown all over the country while the football season is at its height, it is going to make a lot of money for Universal, and as that is why it was made, the fact that I don't think a great deal of it is of no importance whatever. It could have been made very much better than it is. The fact that the whole Notre Dame football team and the original Four Horsemen appear in the picture will have not little to do with its box-office success. Russell Mack directed.

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▼▼ THE TRAINED screen writer who starts with a satisfactory idea for a story and develops it without ever forgetting two things—the camera and the flow of motion—can not fail to produce a scenario from which a box-office picture can be made. The big thought in his mind always must be that the camera is his story-telling medium. If he does not forget that, he will find that in a large measure the flow of motion will take care of itself. Audible dialogue is the greatest check of visual flow that ever has come to pictures. The writer should start with the assumption that all his characters are dumb, and that they gain the power of speech only at rare intervals and only under the most extraordinary circumstances. This will reduce the temptation to become lazy and put in dialogue form a story that with a little thought he could present in action.

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▼▼ ONCE A WEEK Fox shows reviewers one of its pictures in a projection room on its Western Avenue lot. Prior to the showing the reviewers are guests at a dinner served in the Munchers Club. Having been present at a number of these agreeable evening functions, I have come to the conclusion that the most consistent star on the Fox lot is Luigi Liserani, who, as catering manager, is responsible for the dinners that are served. The dishes are selected with rare discrimination, cooked excellently and served tastefully. And Luigi hovers over the tables, smiling urbanely as if each dish were a favorite child. This paragraph does not deal with one of the *Spectator's* usual subjects, but it is consistent with my policy of endeavoring to recognize genius wherever I find it. And it is my only way of paying for the dinners.

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▼▼ I KNOW OF several good stories that are being held from production on account of the inability of producers owning them to find people with box-office names to play the parts. A few years ago Metro cast an unknown girl in the leading part of one of its pictures—*The Torrent*. I have been reading *The Private Life of Greta Garbo*, written by Rilla Page Palmborg, and encountered this paragraph: "*The Torrent* came to the Capitol theatre in New York without the usual ballyhoo. The Metropolitan critics sat spellbound as they watched this new kind of siren. Next day her name blazed in every newspaper. People crowded the theatre to see her. She met a similar reception wherever the picture was shown. Greta Garbo had become an over-night sensation." Occasionally it pays to take a chance.

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▼▼ BY VIRTUE of its being Bill Powell's first for Warner Brothers, *The Road to Singapore* rates as an important picture. As a picture, however, it is not important. It bored me excessively in spite of some good acting here and there by Bill and generally excellent direction by Al Green. The two idiots who wander through scenes and fail so signally to make the audience laugh, add greatly to the prevailing depression. I was delighted with the performance of Doris Kenyon and impressed with the work of the man who played the doctor, and Marian Marsh, who played his sister. There were four of us in our party. The two wives enjoyed the picture. From a box-office standpoint that is more important than the fact that I did not enjoy it.

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▼▼ THE SCREEN has very little in common with the stage. They are two entirely different arts. The screen is more nearly akin to music than it is to the stage, and the only influence the stage can have on the screen is harmful. On the other hand, the stage already has benefitted greatly by the influence upon it that the screen has had. In almost all the plays produced during the past few years there were evidences of the efforts made by directors to adapt to their use the technic that the screen has developed, whereas the one thing which more than any other has brought on the present box-office depression among film theatres was the screen's wholesale imitation of the stage as soon as pictures began to talk.

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▼▼ WHY DO WE like to sit on the bank of a stream and watch the water go by? Because it is a perfect motion picture, one that preserves its flow of motion, one that tells a pleasant story to our eyes, that employs only our visual sense while all our other senses are at rest. If the stream talked to us in words we would not sit on its bank and listen to its prattle. A motion picture—a real motion picture—is a stream that flows by us on the screen. Its story is more involved than that of the stream that crosses the meadow, and occasionally it has to say something in words to make its meaning clear, but every time it talks it loses something of its status as a motion picture. Obviously it should talk as little as possible, and then what it says should not disturb its rhythmic flow.

▼▼ PRODUCERS ASSURE us that their greatest desire now is to get more action into their motion pictures, a desire which takes the form of an order to their writers. Anything that has to be inserted into a film creation upon someone's order, does not belong in it. The creation itself dictates the amount of action that should be in it. If when a story is prepared for shooting it does not contain enough action, the remedy, if the making of a perfect motion picture be the objective, is not to force action into it. The story should be discarded and the producer should select one that contains sufficient action without being tortured to take on more.

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▼▼JOHN GOULD FLETCHER, an artist with an analytical brain and sound judgment, says this in a booklet which he entitles, *The Crisis of the Film:* "If some miraculous power could give . . . audiences the idea that what the screen was to give them was not a story at all, but only pictures—that is to say, pictorial art—the whole motion picture industry would take a great step forward. The theme in itself is unimportant, the growth and development of it is practically all." I am afraid I have tired *Spectator* readers with repetitions of the same thoughts. Fletcher's conclusions are the only ones that can be reached by anyone who thinks in terms of the screen.

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▼▼ QUITE FREQUENTLY in American and foreign publications we see references to the fact that Hollywood is growing up mentally. Writers who visit us are impressed with the intellectual standard of our social functions. There always have been plenty of intellectual people in Hollywood. In the silent days they expressed themselves on the screen. Denied that outlet now, they express themselves in drawing rooms. It is there that visiting intellectuals encounter them, and the visitors are impressed by Hollywood's brains while the outside world persists in refusing to be impressed by Hollywood's pictures.

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▼▼ WRITERS ARE struggling to keep down the amount of dialogue in their scripts. I tell the writers whom I am coaching that they must start with the assumption that all their characters are dumb and that the camera is their only story-telling medium. Anyone who starts off with that idea need not worry about the amount of dialogue a script will contain. He will be surprised to find out how much story can be told without the aid of audible speech. Writers, however, are not responsible for the fact that pictures have talked themselves to death. They wrote only what their bosses demanded.

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▼▼ PHILIP K. SCHEUER, writing in the *Los Angeles Times:* "Hergesheimer happens to be my own especial favorite; but the lost ecstasy, the bittersweet savor of vanished years which permeates his novels, is untranslatable (on the screen)." Anything is possible to the screen. It can accentuate anything that any other art can do. I do not agree with Philip. The screen can excel in its treatment of the very elements that he places beyond its powers.

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▼▼ THERE IS disappointment in store for those who view *Sob Sister* in expectation of finding again the Jimmy Dunn of *Bad Girl.* In the picture directed by Frank Borzage Dunn is a lovable, emotional human being who goes straight to our hearts; in *Sob Sister,* directed by Alfred Santell, he is just an actor speaking lines, quite an ordinary actor speaking ordinary lines. As the sob sister, Linda Watkins is equally unimpressive. The picture is not up to the new standard that Fox productions have set, principally because one can not imagine a girl of her sort doing the things that Miss Watkins does.

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▼▼ THE FILM INDUSTRY attaches too much importance to box-office names. The theoretical perfect motion picture would need nothing but its own perfection to give it box-office value. The only value of a box-office name is that of a substitute for perfection in a picture. If a producer thought only in terms of the picture he was making, and cast it with regard only for its own welfare as a work of screen art, he would find that the desired box-office values would be attained automatically.

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▼▼ A. Jympson Harman meets most of the Hollywood stars who visit London. In the *London Evening News* he tells how they impress him: "Few of the famous Hollywood stars one meets impress one as being particularly clever people. A modicum of intelligence and a great deal of physical attraction go to the making of a star. The rest is photography, camera trickery, clever scenario-writing and able direction."

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▼▼ I AM AN INVETERATE radio addict. An instrument whose tones I keep subdued, is within reaching distance of the chair in which I sit and do my writing. I would like the announcers to know that I am not curious about the copyright owners. As far as I am concerned radio orchestras can go ahead and play any old thing they like, whether or not they have the permission of the copyright owners.

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▼▼ IN RECKLESS LIVING Norman Foster bets two dollars on a horse at four to one. "If I had won, I would have had eight dollars, instead of two," he tells his wife. The dialogue writer should take a course at Agua Caliente. If Norman had won, he would have had ten dollars.

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▼▼ AN ENGLISH paper says that the novelty of the sound camera saved the film industry three years ago, and it wonders what novelty can be discovered to save it now. There is just one—the novelty of applying to motion pictures the fundamental principles of screen art.

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▼▼ WE WERE quite comfortable at the beach all summer, but a condition arose which made it impossible for me to feel altogether satisfied: my pipe tobacco was too damp all the time. So we've moved to a hilltop in Hollywoodland.

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▼▼ I NEVER have seen anything more beautiful than the faces of children at a circus when the clowns are going through their antics. I don't look at the clowns.

▼ ▼

▼▼ THE ONLY motion picture that can be a real financial success is one that tells its story with the camera. Twenty words—no more—no less.

More Mutterings From The East Coast

By R. E. Sherwood

In his ample column in the *New York World-Telegram*, Heywood Broun said:

"I saw *Street Scene* at the Rivoli Theatre. There is no longer any doubt in my mind that what we actors like to call the 'legitimate theatre' is at the moment on the run. At least, it must abandon certain fortified positions to the new art-form . . . I think the picture version of *Street Scene* is better than the play."

While agreeing with Mr. Broun's high opinion of Samuel Goldwyn's, King Vidor's and Elmer Rice's fine picture, I beg to inform him that his fears for the legitimate theatre are groundless.

As long as the motion picture industry continues to depend on Elmer Rice and other playwrights for its material, the legitimate theatre is sitting pretty. Far from being ruined by the movies, it is being subsidized by them.

I don't believe that the authors or the Broadway producers of such plays as *Holiday, Five Star Final, Street Scene, The Guardsman, A Free Soul, Daddy Long Legs, Bad Girl, The Front Page* or even *Waterloo Bridge* are horrified to learn that these works are better and more successful on the screen than they were on the stage. Every one of them has put needed money in theatrical pockets, and has also increased the demand for more works from the same source.

If Hollywood is delivering Broadway a series of knock-out punches with one hand, with the other hand it is supplying it with the elixir of life.

▼▼ There would be sufficient grounds for alarm on the part of Mr. Broun and other drama-defenders if the film folk were to stop dealing with admirable but second-hand material like *Street Scene* and dedicate themselves to material of their own creation.

I have said it before, and I expect to say it frequently again, that the moving picture can never hold its head up as an individual art-form as long as it requires repeated blood transfusions from other art-forms.

The outrageous prices paid for the film rights to plays or novels provide pathetic evidence of the moving picture's incomprehensible inability to create its own ideas.

▼▼ These remarks may seem a bit odd coming from one who has sold four plays to the movies, and who is glad of it, and who hopes to sell many more as the years roll by.

But before I was ever a playwright I was a picture critic, and in my original capacity I have been compelled to deplore the very practice by which in my later capacity I have profited.

Back in the dimly remembered silent era, Adolph Zukor with a grand gesture offered a prize of $10,000 to be presented annually to the author of the best story presented on the screen during the preceding twelvemonth. The committee selected to make this award was composed of authors who ranged all the way in importance from Mary Roberts Rinehart to myself.

We met to decide the disposition of the ten grand, and there was of course terrific disagreement. Most of the committee felt that the prize should go to some novelist or playwright, whose work had been adapted, rather than to some mere screen writer.

There were just two of us who hotly protested. We said that the prize-winner should be one who had created directly for the screen, who had composed a moving picture. Our first choice was Charlie Chaplin, for *A Woman of Paris*. Our second choice was Elton Thomas, the faintly mythical author of *The Thief of Baghdad*.

However, the two of us were shouted and voted down. The $10,000 check went to Rafael Sabatini for *Scaramouche*.

You might be interested to know that the other member of the minority on this committee was Elmer Rice.

And you might also be interested to know that the Adolph Zukor Annual $10,000 Prize has never been heard of since.

Too Highbrow?

▼▼ Continuing his comments on *Street Scene*, Heywood Broun made this startling but true statement:

"My only real complaint against the talkies is that they are too high-brow. It is a great pity that scenario writers and directors have cringed so much before the attacks of the literary fellows. And I think we would all be better off if it were not for the influence of importations from Germany and Russia. These films may be excellent, but not when diluted and transplanted. When a certain self-consciousness about art enters in, story-telling is apt to lose its edge. And the chief function of a talking picture, just as that of a play, is to spin its tale as rapidly, as concisely and as clearly as possible . . . And I think that the cause for straightforward story-telling will be furthered all along the line as soon as there is frank recognition of the fact that the picture-going public of America is bourgeois."

Mr. Broun concludes with an injunction to all picture people: "Don't let the intellectuals, proletarian or aristocratic, scare you! Be yourselves!"

▼▼ This is good advice, but I doubt that it will be taken. Hollywood is the most self-conscious community on earth. It suffers from a corporate inferiority complex which makes it at once diffident and blatantly self-assertive.

Anyone, highbrow or lowbrow, who is smart enough to see beyond Hollywood's loud talk and into its timid soul can put himself over on Hollywood and make a fortune out of it. Hollywood is always ready to believe that every impressive stranger is the new Messiah, and to do exactly what he says. Hollywood is the supreme sucker.

There will be many more pictures to cheer for when those who make them have learned to be themselves and not merely film versions of their peers.

Erratum

▼▼ Please forgive me for one more allusion to *Waterloo Bridge*, but I must correct a mistake made by Mr. Beaton in his review of the picture.

In setting forth the plot, he said: "The first thing they do is to search for potatoes dropped by an old woman, a human

and amusing touch that we could expect to come from the fertile brain of my colleague, Bob Sherwood."

While granting the fertility, I must announce that this human and amusing touch came from the brain of either James Whale, Benn Levy or Tom Reed, or possibly from the brains of all three of them in conference, but not from mine.

Sob Sister

▼▼ THE BEAUTIFUL, clear day when all rough stuff would be eliminated from the screen has again been postponed. *Sob Sister* is with us, and if there's any sweetness or light in this one, or any lovely, exalting message of wholesomeness, then perhaps the time has come for me to visit an eye and ear specialist.

Sob Sister is in the main a good picture, very well directed (by Alfred Santell) and skilfully played. But it's dirty.

The heroine, impersonated by that flower-like blonde, Linda Watkins, is a sweet girl who gyps her fellow reporters out of stories, who worms her way into the home of a dear old couple whose daughter has been murdered with a torch, who steals photographs from family albums for reproduction on a tabloid front page, and who gives herself whole-heartedly to her boy friend (with medium shot of the rumpled bed.)

Miss Watkins is an extremely good actress, and I don't think that the Fox Film Corporation has made any mistake in its enthusiasm for her. Nor do I blame Mr. Sheehan a bit for being sore at the Wampas. But I do think that she has been given a poor start in her screen career. Assigning her to the title role of *Sob Sister* was as bad a blunder as the casting of Janet Gaynor in *The Man Who Came Back*.

James Dunn is excellent as the recipient of her favors and the victim of her double-crossing. He has a bad time with some of the excessively cute dialogue, but that isn't his fault. Appearing as a reporter on the dignified *Times*, he looks more than ever like Walter Winchell.

▼▼ THERE ARE plenty of people on Broadway who would not be broken-hearted if Linda Watkins were to fail in Hollywood. For she is sorely needed on the New York stage, where she had gained recognition as that rarest of treasures, an intelligent ingenue.

In the *New York Sun*, Ward Morehouse has commented on the staggering losses that Broadway has lately suffered.

Aside from Miss Watkins, there are Helen Chandler, Sylvia Sidney, Miriam Hopkins, Dorothy Jordan, Peggy Shannon, Dorothy Hall, Irene Purcell, Constance Cummings, Madge Evans, Irene Dunne, Sidney Fox and Claudette Colbert.

Mr. Morehouse adds: "Watch them grab Margaret Sullavan, now of *The Modern Virgin*, when her contract with the Shuberts runs out."

Perhaps the theatre is doomed, after all, if all the young ladies who combine beauty with talent are to be seduced by Hollywood gold.

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Outburst From the Dean

(Dean of Newcastle in Film Weekly, Australia)

Unfortunately, there is a type of picture, which is hideous in its vulgarity, and presents human nature as something loathsome and degraded. . . . . I believe the root of the trouble is that Hollywood, which is the center of the film industry, is controlled by a small group of men, chiefly of Oriental stock, few of whom have been adequately educated for the handling of such a gigantic thing as a picture industry. I believe that in Australia, our censors and those responsible for the screening of pictures, are doing their difficult task as best they can. What is needed is a strong educated public opinion, that will demand that the pictures are rescued from influences that would degrade them.

Notes From Some Other Spectators

By Dalton Trumbo

Although we don't mention it very often, the *Spectator* mail box usually bulges with reader communications. These letters can't be termed "fan mail." A unique intelligence runs through the majority of them. Their substance seems to indicate that the *Spectator* is more of a stimulus to its readers than an entertainment. Not all of them are complimentary, nor are they all in agreement with the views and opinions variously set down in the pages of this publication. But it is a matter of relief to those who read them that they distinctly are not the usual run of letters which reach an editorial office. Not once have we received the regulation sort, which inevitably read: "That article by Joe Gumpus is a wow. Let us have more of Joe Gumpus! The kids just fight for your pleasant home publication, and our friends, too, think it's simply swell!"

The discussion of television inaugurated by Bob Sherwood and abetted by the editor, has produced a reply or two that merit consideration by anybody. L. F. Sturgeon, who appears to know his subject, writes in this fashion:

> Anyone knows that if miniature golf could alarm the box-office boosters, as it did last summer, that good television art will not only cause some excitement, but will also walk away with the grand sweepstakes unless those to be affected wake up. Furthermore, television will not send through the air to the home anything, art or otherwise, that does not come up to the requirements of both, and while it is undoubtedly true someone will have to produce negatives for some of the television programs, it's high-time for those experienced and at present in a better position to make such negatives, to start learning something about art and its place in the theatre and/or home, or competition will play no part whatever between the motion picture industry and television.

▼▼ And Frederick Davis, discussing the same subject, goes into it even further. Says Mr. Davis:

> You say that people, especially women who stay at home all day, are not going to give up outside diversion. Certainly they won't—much. Humans are gregarious; but that doesn't mean that, once they get outside their front doors, they head automatically for the nearest movie palace. They aren't doing it now; motion-picture patronage has never been at a lower ebb. We agree that the depression is not wholly to blame for this slacking up of movie custom. People are getting their evening's diversion without such general recourse to the movies; they've got to have it, but it needn't be movies. It may be the beach, or outdoor games, or bridge, or simply driving around in the car. Everybody will keep on hooting around outside the home, even after television invades the living-room. But when folks want their allotted measure of entertainment from moving images on the screen, why shouldn't they get it at home?
>
> When television busts loose, the novelty of it will cause a nation-wide upheaval in people's amusement-getting habits. For a little while talkie houses will be almost deserted. The novelty will wear off—and will television then sink into a bog, as the talkies have done? I think not. Why not? Because television will be supported by advertisers. The advertisers will demand value for their money. They will see that interest is kept up and that the public gets what it wants. In other words the fate of television will be determined by business men.
>
> Not so the talkies. Nobody in the studio is trying to make money for the company. Nobody working on a picture has the shadow of a thought about earning money for the stock-holders. The chief thought of the movie workers is, has been, and will be this—just to hold onto their jobs in any way possible. Politics and backslapping will keep their jobs for them much longer than the quality, if any, of their talent. The quality of televised programs will, then, in the long run, be decidedly higher than the movies in the scattered neighborhood houses.

▼▼ Walter Merrill, who knows something about motion pictures himself, doesn't mention the threat of television, but he does have some interesting things to say about diversification and cycle pictures:

> It simmers down to this: If you had to eat cake all day, would you not get sick of it? I ruined my taste for cake that way. If a producer would pick a story carefully, regardless of its type, and such story to suit its particular needs for its stars, and being assured that they had a good story, select a director who seemed best equipped and capable of directing that story. The director should have some say-so about his players, for after all, he has to direct them, and who knows better about just what he can accomplish with the players than the director himself? Now, if this good story, assuming that it is, is well-prepared and as you say: "If the story is in the script," then how can a studio miss getting screen entertainment? What do the public care if the story is gang, western, society, sex or what-have-you, if it is good? If a studio made a successful society picture and drew returns, then why kill the good taste left in the mouth of theatre patrons by overdoing it? I am convinced they should pick an entirely different type of story to follow and produce it just as well and then they would keep up the public's interest by diversifying the diet.

And just to show that Mr. Merrill's attitude is not purely a professional one, there is a note from Louise Schmidt, who lives in Mountain View. She professes complete studio ignorance of motion pictures, and perhaps it is significant that her views should elaborate upon those expressed above. She writes:

> I have observed that pictures come in what might be called quality cycles, especially in and near such a city as San Francisco. . . . By that I mean that for a few weeks there will be in each theatre good pictures with outstanding stars . . . then will follow a period of only fair pictures in nearly every major theatre . . . following these comes a horde of poor and impossible pictures that are really an insult to even the uncritical person's taste and intelligence. This may be just a coincidence, but it seems like a scheme to have what might be called a balanced competition so that all releases will have a somewhat equal chance at the public's money. It is really so infallible that I can well-nigh plan by weeks a schedule of motion picture entertainment alternating with other kinds, if the need arises, and I am sure I want to see certain pictures. I once guessed exactly when during that year a certain star's pictures would be released in San Francisco, learning from some news item what pictures would be made by that star in that year. And then I predicted that certain other pictures would be released in that period, with other stars; and my guess was correct.

By the way, I once also missed in my calculations about a picture I wanted to see, and learned later that there was much retaking, remaking and re-everything at M-G-M after that picture had been previewed. I didn't know that until after I had commented, upon seeing the picture, that "something seems out of joint in it, but I can't say what." So even we who don't know anything of the making of pictures can recognize trouble that a picture has had in production.

▼▼ FRANK E. HATCH, who lives in Boston and who from the quality of his stationery, must be a very busy and a very successful man, pauses long enough to send the following note:

In renewing my subscription I want to say that while the talkers hold little interest for me, I am still intensely interested in the *Spectator*, and its campaign for the application of brains in the making of pictures.

I still think that *Hell's Heroes* was a poor interpretation of *The Three Godfathers* and that the stage has contributed something to the screen in the way of directors and some damn fine actors.

Someone who writes anonymously, in order, he says, "that he be not responsible for starting a hundred year war of controversy," has something to say about the segregation of responsibility for the success or failure of a picture:

The problem is very simple. Merely to allocate in percentage the amount of responsibility due each of the individuals in the case of a bad picture, and if the figures vary, the percentage accredited each in the event of an excellent picture. I refer to what is termed organization pictures, not specials. In other words, the average bread and butter program pictures from which we make our living,—if any.

And when the *Spectator* editor had his say about the dictation of the sales office to production forces, he struck a sympathetic note in the heart of Jesse J. Goldburg of Perfection Pictures, who writes:

Coming to the heading *Salesmen*, you should sit in on some of these sales conferences held in New York and your righteous indignation would mount to the point where your reason might be threatened.

Within the past thirty days I have been advised by sales executives in New York that "Now is the time to make Gigolo pictures," "Now is the time to make kid pictures," "Now is the time to make gangster pictures," "Now is the time to make musical comedies"; in fact they covered the entire field with but one exception, they forgot, or rather failed to state that "Now is the time to make intelligent pictures."

Keep up your "hammering," sooner or later the results you seek must find their realization to some degree and producers and the public alike will profit by your efforts.

▼▼ IT WILL BE remembered that several issues back Robert E. Nash disputed with Mr. Beaton the financial condition of the various motion picture companies. His response to the editor's reply is worthy of reprint:

We are at present emerging from probably the worst business depression this country has witnessed, a depression that is world-wide, a depression that has necessitated immediate drastic action on the part of our chief executive to alleviate worse conditions in countries of Europe. Taking this depression into consideration, motion picture companies producing talkies have not done so badly. This fact can readily be appreciated when a leading railroad such as New York Central reports net earnings so far this year equivalent to approximately half of what they were a year ago, and when you consider the drastic decline in earnings of the United States Steel Corporation, a company which is looked upon as the barometer of all industry in this country.

You are no doubt, partly correct in your assumption that I know little of motion pictures, but I have been agreeably entertained by such pictures as *The Smiling Lieutenant*, *A Free Soul* and *The Front Page*. However, even though my knowledge of pictures is small, it does seem to me, to be an impossible task to produce nothing but successes. The stage and every other form of entertainment has found that to be impossible.

The question of musical pictures and their return—a decision which invariably gives producers blind jitters—is mentioned by Jerry Stewart, who writes from Pasadena:

I'm beginning to wonder if the time isn't ripe for one of our producers to crash through with a good rip-snorting musical, not one of those all-singing, all-talking, all-dancing, all-stage monstrocities, but something along the lines of *Monte Carlo* or *The Love Parade*, with plenty of action, and a lot of catchy music (sung, incidentally, by people who can really sing). Lately I have found myself hungering for music in pictures—like a man, denied smokes for a week, hungering after a cigarette. And I have no objection whatever to the so-called "off-stage" orchestra (*vide The Broadway Melody* and *Let's Go Native*)—provided the actors can sing and the music is good.

▼▼ AND SOMEBODY who writes from "The Sidelines" but who neglects to mention on which sideline he is standing, takes rather sharp issue with those who are demanding silence in their pictures:

Your inference that sound is ruinous to the art of motion pictures is as foolish as the cry so often heard when new developments come along. The Creator made us with ears as well as eyes to use in conjunction with our brains, but the brain must act intelligently. Sound is a perfectly natural part of us and of our surroundings. Your idea of "a perfect motion picture" as one containing "no audible dialogue or sound effects" is so artificially imaginary that it conveys no intelligent concept. Even in most forms of imagination there is reality. A perfect motion picture? Well, "there ain't no sech animal," nor will there ever be one, so why bring that up?

No, Mr. Editor, the trouble with you fellows is not so much lack of understanding, as lack of proper coördination of the developments which men's brains evolve from year to year. Progress is inevitable, so that leaves out perfection. When a thing is perfect progress stops.

The man who wrote as above should read Mr. Beaton's

article in this issue entitled *"Devotion" and Fundamentals.* His answer is there.

Occasionally a letter reaches the office crammed with meat in the form of concrete examples, names, figures and proof. Such a communication is one signed merely "A Reader." The apology for his failure to sign a name speaks for itself. "If the writer's name ever became connected with the example he sets forth here, the political swine in Hollywood would kill him deader than Kelcy's pup." Which, say we, is reason enough. The facts contained in the letter we will save, but there is a paragraph or two which amply demonstrate the quality of "A Reader's" vitriol.

> Because Wall Street men haven't yet found out the real low down they must know that grotesque salaries are paid to men who don't rate one-tenth of what these men are drawing, but what they will sooner or later learn is—that if they have the "guts" to break the hold these parasites have on the business and if they will begin to train young college men to replace these damned parasites, they will discover that they can replace more than half the studio personnel and by the colossal monies that are saved they could even continue the present lavish waste in actual production and still make staggering profits.
>
> You know this game inside and out. You've forgotten more about what is really necessary than the majority who draw these stupendous salaries. Thus you know that the staggering costs are not for sets, or stories or even stars, but for the salaries paid to nincompoops and their political parasites, uncles, cousins, nephews and relatives.
>
> Pictures and picture business will eventually come back to a sane and conservative basis . . . and mainly along the plans you have outlined in the *Spectator.* It will prove that men outside of the sacred circle of the inner politicians know as much, perhaps more, than this sacred circle or favored ones. They'll wake up sooner or later and the *Spectator* will be the paper that will do the job.

▼ ▼ ▼

Failure of Exhibitors' Conference

(Cinematograph Times, London)

The meeting to end injustices to American exhibitors ended in smoke. Twenty-one organizations of independent U. S. exhibitors were represented at a national gathering in New York, summoned to lower percentages, abolish score charges, re-establish flat rentals, end forever distributor-dominance of the exhibiting business. For lack of leadership or lack of conviction, the meeting did no more than confirm Hollywood in its comfortable belief that cinema exhibitors are the world's most vacillating, ineffective, disunited body of men, whose tantrums it is hardly necessary to notice. . . . Thereafter the meeting went to pieces. A deal of time was devoted to criticism of Constance Bennett's salary. Exhibitors went on record as being opposed to crime and sex films, and alibied themselves by claiming that they have to play them because they are included in the Hollywood outputs. They then permitted themselves to be moved to tears by a distributor's sales head's speech to the effect that his company has lost between a million and a quarter of a million dollars on each of twenty films during the past three years; the one most frequently quoted was a silent one made over three years ago. Nobody seems to have observed that this company has consistently paid the handsomest dividends, and is now financially the most stable of Hollywood's Big Four.

Percentage Playing Evil

(Abram F. Myers, Allied Exhibitor)

One feature that has received too little attention is that percentage playing necessarily involves checking. Apart from the annoyance and friction created by the checking of theatres and auditing of their accounts is the economic waste incident to maintaining large and costly organizations for that pur-

pose. There is need in the industry to-day for the large sums of money being paid to these checking bureaus for keeping the theatres under a provocative surveillance. If pictures were sold on a flat rental basis for what they are fairly worth this heavy burden saddled on the industry by percentage playing could be eliminated and a step towards true economy taken. I commend this thought to the Wall Street interests who are insisting on a false economy to be accomplished by a cheese-paring policy in the studios.

Criticism From the Ignorant

(M. C. Brennan, Film Weekly, Australia)

It is a strange thing; but many of those who malign motion pictures the most, seldom (or never), see them; and if certain newspapers—which derive a steady and plentiful support from film advertisers—would only stop long enough to consider the inanity of certain statements made by the class of person who, metaphorically speaking, talks through his, or her, hat, they would be doing our business a far greater amount of good than by publishing a lot of tripe, which is as senseless as it is untruthful.

Suggestion for Picture Improvement

(Wid's)

It is the job of every production and sales executive and every creative worker to know technical values, entertainment values and sales values. Everybody admits we need more good pictures. Everybody knows you must have qualified man power to make good pictures. All right, find out who knows and who doesn't know about pictures. Make them put it in writing. If you really want to locate your showmen—your men whose opinions matter—let's get it on the record. I think it's a grand idea. What do you say? Who'll start finding out the facts about his organization by asking them to put it in writing?

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912.

Of Hollywood Spectator, puhlished every other Saturday at Los Angeles, California, for October 1, 1931.

State of California, County of Los Angeles—ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Howard Hill, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Hollywood Spectator and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, Film Spectator, Inc., 6362 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California.

Editor, Welford Beaton, 6362 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California.

Managing Editor, Welford Beaton, 6362 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California.

Business Manager, Howard Hill, 6362 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

Film Spectator, Inc., 6362 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California.

Welford Beaton, 6362 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.)

None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the compay as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is..... (This information is required from daily publication only.)

HOWARD HILL, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 10th day of October, 1931.

(Seal) LENA B. FOWLER.

(My commission expires May 3, 1934.)

TRUMBO REVIEWS

Chalk One Up For Music

▼▼ *PARDON US.* Sometimes I become irritated when I am forced to forsake a pet aversion. One such prejudice was that Laurel and Hardy could never turn out a really funny picture. I have seen several of their shorts and considered them quite inane. When friends told me that they enjoyed this odd duo I was pained and a little inclined to view them with suspicion. But all of this has passed away, and I honestly can report that *Pardon Us* is a refreshing and enjoyable production.

A great deal of credit for the success of this picture—for it will be a success—lies at the door of the man (name not given in credits) who arranged the musical score, and of Hal E. Roach, who permitted it to be used. From beginning to end the picture is synchronized with soothing and delightful effect. Quite often the music is a very faint background, so subtle that the audience is not quite aware of it. Then again it increases in volume to inject sound effects which harmonize with the action that is under way. By a clever manipulation of well known musical themes the score goes much farther toward interpreting the story than the auditor suspects. Two singing sequences, one in a cotton field and one within a prison, are perfectly in keeping with the story. If the musical score can be used so successfully in comedy, producers soon should come to the realization that its value is inestimable in assisting the emotional progress of more serious productions.

As for the story, it is very idiotic, and yet strangely logical. The pair start into the beer business, go to jail, escape and are recaptured, foil a prison riot, and are pardoned. A "buzzing tooth" in Laurel's mouth provides some excellent comedy, and the dental sequence is side-splitting. James Parrott directs skilfully, and with one or two brief exceptions the action is swift. Some excellent cutting went into the picture. Beside the two principals, competent characterizations are given by Wilfred Lucas, June Marlowe, Jimmy Finlayson and Walter Long.

Winnie Improves

▼▼ *SIDE SHOW* presents us with a Winnie Lightner who has almost dropped the vaudeville attitude, in consequence of which she has become a better cinema actress. Her previous picture, if I remember correctly, was *Gold Dust Gertie* which was almost as bad a production as Warners ever released. And that is pretty bad when the early Vitaphone efforts are considered. Miss Lightner is given an opportunity to offer herself to the public as a fairly rational citizen in *Side Show*, and gains considerable audience interest as a result. She is splendid in the semi-hard boiled character which she portrays. I hope she never again is handed the slap-stick roles of the past.

But the picture, while an improvement over her earlier efforts, is a little flat. Slightly episodic, it interests mildly, but has only one scene to raise it above its level. When Miss Lightner replaces the high diver, the shots taken from her precarious position before the leap are interesting, and the situation itself is tense. After that the production slips into its routine, and there is nothing more worthy of comment.

▼▼ CHARLES BUTTERWORTH is completely wasted. I thought his work enjoyable in *The Bargain*, but he is sadly out of character in this later picture. He should be reserved for more sophisticated stuff. Evalyn Knapp and Donald Cook control the love interest and Cook handles a difficult role with considerable skill. Guy Kibbee portrays the alcoholic circus owner, but under the usual disadvantages. He talks too much. He is so delightful a character that invariably his parts are overloaded with dialogue. Dialogue, in truth, is the prime fault of *Side Show*.

It is adapted from the play of William K. Wells by Arthur Caesar and Raymond Enright. Mervyn LeRoy directed, and I'm willing to wager dollars to doughnuts that, given his choice, he would have selected better story material with which to work.

Competent Acting

▼▼ *THE MAD PARADE* is a triumph for the young women who enact its difficult roles, and for William Beaudine, who directs what essentially is an old story with such skill that it really becomes interesting. The adaptation is by Henry McCarthy and Frank R. Conklin. Critics have so generally termed the story a female *Journey's End* that I claim no credit for verifying the statement. Had *The Mad Parade* been produced two years ago it would have been a smash. And even now I'll wager that its box-office results won't be disappointing.

There are four excellent pieces of acting in this story of women at the front. Evelyn Brent's work is a fine and sincere performance, perhaps the best she has done. That is a great deal for me to say when it is considered that I am a fervent admirer of her portrayals. Lilyan Tashman, as the sardonic, sensible, wine-bibbing cynic has everything her own way. To those who already are quailing before what promises to be a tidal wave of screen sentimentality, I commend Miss Tashman as a refreshing antidote. Fritzi Ridgeway meets a very bloody destiny in a shell-rocked dugout, and so flawless is her characterization of the snooping little gossip that I hailed her demise with vindictive glee. June Clyde is sincere and touching in a role that saves the production from becoming completely hard-boiled. Then also there is Irene Rich, Marceline Day and the Keating twins, all of whom fulfill difficult roles competently.

I wonder where the Hays organization was sleeping when *Mad Parade* received the censorial okeh. There are two damns, one hell, and several guts hidden away in the dialogue. It has been so long since my ears were thus assaulted from the screen that I experienced a delicious school-boy thrill. This may not be so good for the kiddies, but for myself I hail it with enthusiasm. It was Hollywood's usual penchant for going to extremes which resulted in the censorship of profanity. It has learned its lesson now. If the Hays snoopers wisely will continue to sleep we will have more such discrete cursing as that in *Mad Parade*, and pictures will be more realistic for the change.

Lowell Sherman Again

▼▼ *HIGH STAKES* is an amusing and vivacious little picture, due, no doubt, to the directorial ability of Lowell Sherman. He rightly has achieved a reputation for handling just such themes as animate *High Stakes*, and in addition he turns in a very amusing performance as a permanently inebriated playwright who has never sold a play. There are great numbers of such people in these United States, but if they all were as clever as Sherman, their presence would be a blessing instead of a curse.

The most puzzling performance of the picture is given by Mae Murray. If Sherman intended her to over-act her part so ridiculously in all but the last sequences of the picture—and surely she could not have done it without his approval—I am prepared to accept her with reservations. I don't believe a smart adventuress would spread it on so thick, even for the benefit of so gullible a gentleman as Edward Martindel. But perhaps I am wrong. It was not without a tinge of regret that I watched Miss Murray's performance. I simply could not forget those beautiful little feet that pattered through the sequences of *The Merry Widow* years ago. The nostalgia of that performance seemed to pervade the theatre during *High Stakes* and I could not escape feeling a little wistful. She has to be very careful these days to conceal her second chin. But chin or no chin, I suspect that she could give cards and spades to a great many performers in a later and more talkative era.

Karen Morley's work in this production is of a high order. Just last week I noticed her picture with a few publicity spreads beneath it stating that she was beautiful. The fact that she is not beautiful, publicity writers to the contrary, is what accounts for her present and future success. She is one of the most charming actresses on the screen, and has one of the loveliest speaking voices. Whenever she appears, so far as I am concerned, she dominates all other characters by her quiet, intelligent and sympathetic portrayals. If you are not interested in Lowell Sherman or Mae Murray, you should attend *High Stakes* if for no other reason than to see Miss Morley in a beautiful bit of acting. It is a Radio picture.

Utter Trash

▼▼ *NIGHT LIFE IN RENO* is a very bad picture. It is the worst that I have seen. It is so fearful a cinematic effort that the Los Angeles Theatre, where it was shown locally, advertised a normally poor stage revue to the utter exclusion of the picture during the last three days of its run. And when theatres refuse to tell their customers what is going to be shown them until the money is in the till, you can safely wager that something quite horrible is happening on the screen.

Almost there is nothing good about *Night Life*. Virginia Valli, Pat O'Malley and Carmelita Geraghty have the leading roles. They mutter their lines dutifully and let matters drift to the inevitable and illogical conclusion. There are other actors, but it will be a kindness to them to omit their names. If you're really

interested, you will find all the credits on the last page of this issue. A negro maid turns in the most amateurish bit of work I have seen anywhere.

The dialogue is stupid and verbose, the plot is utterly without sense, the settings are ridiculous, the characterizations are without a touch of reason, and even the arrangement of actors upon the screen is awkward and stilted. Raymond Cannon directs the sad affair, and Supreme Pictures is the company which spent good money to produce it. I presume *Night Life* was one of those pictures destined from its inception to be a complete flop, that everyone even remotely connected with it sensed the fact, and that as a result nobody cared whether it lived or died. Better that it had died, save for one advantage. The horde of unknowns who are trying to break into pictures should study *Night Life* with an eye to avoiding every situation, scene and characterization which it contains. If they take to heart the lessons it has to teach and are able to deal in opposites, the town will be overrun with geniuses within three weeks.

Direction Makes This One

▼▼ *PERSONAL MAID* is not a fortunate picture for Nancy Carroll, but I am happy for one thing: she has abandoned the Dietrich pose with disjointed hips and glazed eyes *a la Night Angel*, and has become once more a winsome Irish girl. The direction of Monta Bell distinguishes this Cinderella story from so many others and makes from it a fairly successful motion picture. The opening sequence is very clever as the camera follows a dumb waiter through a cheap apartment house, presenting to the audience snatches of conversation from each strata. Sound effects are beautifully worked out. When Miss Carroll becomes interested in a want ad, the sounds of Amos 'n' Andy on the radio fade. And again in the train sequences a sustained reality is evident.

I am interested in Gene Raymond who in this picture is an offensive Yale expatriate who wears racoon coats and tries to seduce servant girls. His character development from the embryo scoundrel to a virtuous young man—thanks to Nancy—is somewhat dubious psychologically, but quite pleasant to watch. George Fawcett disappointed me a little by his characterization of the tyrannical multi-millionaire. The part was over-acted rather badly. Mary Boland's work, on the contrary, was delightful. Some wise producer is going to feature her strongly one of these days, and cash in at the box-office surprisingly well. Pat O'Brien is assigned a priggish role and handles it beautifully. Hugh O'Connell, Donald Meek, Ernest Lawford and Jessie Busley comprise the cast.

Personal Maid will prove amusing and interesting in spite of the improbabilities and inconsistencies of the story. That I am unmoved by it is no doubt due to a crabbed disposition. It makes me wish that Monta Bell could be given story material worthy of his really outstanding abilities.

Celluloid History

▼▼ *THE WOODROW WILSON MEMORIAL FILM* deserves a place in any picture publication if for no other reason than that it vindicates the screen's immense educational promise. On all hands I hear much ballyhoo to the general effect that the motion picture will eventually enlighten the world, present to students history in the making, broaden the international outlook, etc. But until viewing this film at the Shrine Auditorium I haven't seen any concrete evidence of such benefits. If posterity depends upon Hollywood as it is to-day for enlightenment and education—well, God pity posterity.

The film, which is presented by the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Society of Long Beach, has played in three thousand houses over the country. It is composed of newsrcel shots of the war president, and follows him closely from his inauguration to his death. Naturally the Memorial Society is strongly pro-Wilson, in consequence of which the subtitles are ludicrously prejudiced. The opposition press during the League of Nations uproar is referred to as our "yellow press," all members of the American Army are "fine young fellows," and much ado is made about the supposed moral campaign that was waged against Wilson in consequence of his second marriage. But discounting the absurd prejudice which is expressed in the explanatory notes, the film is of immense historical value.

Some day an inspired playwright is going to produce the drama of Woodrow Wilson in all of its significance. It will be the story of a man who ascended to the most powerful position in the history of the world, and who crashed from the heights to a death that was bitter and untimely. The spiritual significance of the World War and of Wilson will play a much more important part in this drama than the actual facts. If the unknown playwright happens to be reading this review, I suggest that he can do nothing better than procure *Twelve Against the Gods* by the late William Bolitho, and read therein the breathless chapter which deals with the late president. He will have enough material to write ten plays, but if he catches and embodies only a smattering of the message conveyed by Bolitho, he will have produced a masterpiece.

Triangular Love

▼▼ *MORALS FOR WOMEN.* Tiffany has taken up the problem of the kept woman and treated it exhaustively on the screen. The moral is that nice girls shouldn't become the mistresses of their bosses. Or for that matter, of any man. Because, argues Frances Hyland who wrote the opus, when true love barges on the scene, complications are bound to arise. The little girl is very likely to discover, as does Bessie Love, that if one tries to eat one's cake and have it, one runs the risk of ending up with black bread and beans.

And there is the plot of this Phil Goldstone production which Mort Blumenstock directs. There are only two reasons for anybody going to see the film. I list them as follows: (a) a relentless logic and (b) Bessie Love. There were others in the cast. I think of Conway Tearle, Edmund Breese, Otis Harlan, Virginia Lee Corbin, Natalie Moorehead, Lina Basquette, and others. But primarily the film belongs to Bessie Love.

There is no actress on the screen who performs more competently than she. Her voice registers beautifully. Every line she utters is perfectly timed and natural. It is a pleasure to watch a picture in which she works because she always appears to be so completely in control of whatever problems present themselves. One of the mysteries which I am unable to solve is her comparative inactivity.

Difficult Assignment

▼▼ *THE LAST FLIGHT*, adapted from the novel by John Monk Saunders, resolves itself into a test for Saunders who adapted it to the screen and for William Dieterle who directed. Judging by the picture—I haven't read the book—the material offered was just about as far from good screen material as could be found by First National readers. That it has been made into an arresting and sometimes interesting photoplay is a surprising tribute to the skill of the two I have mentioned.

There is no star in *The Last Flight*. Despite reviews which praise Barthelmess highly, I am inclined to think that he is very poorly cast. His work is overshadowed by that of Elliot Nugent and John Mack Brown as far as I am concerned. Nugent especially did an outstandingly fine piece of work. Poor Helen Chandler is going to have me convinced that she is a little below the average mentality if she doesn't insist on a different type of role for her next appearance. Throughout the picture she is apparently on the verge of hysteria, and from her attractive lips proceed some of the most vapid bits of screen conversation that I ever have endured.

▼▼ BUT SHE IS NOT to be condemned. David Manners, Barthelmess, Brown and Nugent all made equally inane comments. The novel by Saunders, as I understand it, portrayed beautifully the post-war degeneration of a group of young airmen. Lines, attitudes and characterizations that very nicely may be set down on paper lose their power when transposed to the screen. Suffice it to say that all conversation in this picture is utterly purposeless and completely idiotic. And let me hasten to add that the underlying theme of the story could not have been brought to the screen differently. As picture material the novel is simply a blank.

How these four airmen—and I must add to their number Walter Byron, who as a scoundrel and snake in the grass *par excellence* brings about their ruin—take up with Miss Chandler and begin a drinking bout that starts in Paris and ends in Portugal, is the complete plot of the story. Death catches up with them, and Barthelmess alone survives to care for Helen, who has immense wealth and at least fifty pairs of shoes to compensate for her peculiar mentality. I enjoyed *The Last Flight* more than most of the pictures reviewed in this issue, but as a photoplay it never should have been produced.

Engaging Mr. Tracy

▼▼ *GOLDIE* is rank propaganda for the Merchant Marine. It appears that all gentlemen who ship out on freighters become Casanovas and Don Juans in the eyes of the women with whom they come in contact. I expect that with this picture Fox has started a back-to-the-sea movement which will go down in history. If you are a sailor you may have women in every port, you may love them, you may brand them, and you may leave them. Moreover they are all beautiful. And they are all passionately devoted to

their sailor men. It is a perfect set-up.

The affair was interesting to me chiefly because of the excellent work of Spencer Tracy. I am utterly confounded with reports from the Fox organization that he is to replace Edmund Lowe, for two more different types could hardly be found, even in Hollywood. Tracy needs to replace no one, because he is a distinct and delightful person himself. There is no more spontaneous gentleman on the screen. With him in *Goldie* is Warren Hymer, a very dumb and very honest sailor man, who falls into the clutches of Jean Harlow and nearly loses a sizable bankroll.

If Mr. Hymer is content to limit himself to character roles, I think that he will have steady work as long as he can hobble about. But if he is starred or ever co-starred very often, he is going to a quick death. His work is sincere and convincing. Jean Harlow is being given too many unfavorable roles. In *Goldie* she is an American gold-digger stranded in a French carnival. I should like to see her portray a nice little clinging vine, just to see how she does it. Director Benjamin Stoloff has handled his story nicely, and the result is an amusing picture, distinguished by Tracy's splendid work.

Newspaper Racket

▼▼ *GRAFT* is Universal's contribution to the newspaper story series. It is about a cub reporter, convincingly played by Regis Toomey, who after being kicked from pillar to post in the city office, lands the biggest scoop of the year. Not exactly a new formula, but one which is fairly sure-fire, and Director Christy Cabanne manages to give the opus plenty of action. The result is a fairly entertaining picture.

It takes about two reels for the story to become believable. In earlier sequences we are shown the inconsideration with which Toomey is treated by the city editor. Later the district attorney is shot while in his study with Sue Carol. If operatives of the law are as dumb in actual life as they are portrayed in the questioning of Miss Carol, it is only because of a personal dislike for governmental responsibility that Al Capone isn't dictator and sole proprietor of the country. At the questioning immediately after the murder, Miss Carol's testimony is to the effect that she was in the room with the murdered man, the doors to the room were all closed, and someone shot him. The detectives accuse poor Sue, and do not consider the possibility of a shot through the window until the blundering Toomey has an idea. The stupidity of the American policeman has been pretty well established by various I. Q. tests, but I hardly think it rates as low as portrayed in this story.

After the unbelievable murder has passed from the screen, things begin to warm up. Dorothy Revier is discovered, Boris Karloff is found to have committed the murder, and Toomey gets his scoop. For good measure he wins Miss Carol to boot. Harold Goodwin, Carmelita Geraghty and Richard Tucker have satisfactory parts in this, a picture which is improbable but mildly engaging.

Tender and Genuine

▼▼ *THE BARGAIN* beautifully escapes practically every pitfall into which it is so easy for a picture to tumble. It wastes no time on maudlin sentimentality, yet it is fine and clean. It sidesteps sexual entanglements, yet it deals with love. It develops a stern and compelling tragedy, yet no gun is drawn, no blood is spilled, and the ending is happy. It is precisely the type of picture which the industry needs. If it doesn't make money —for its appeal is universal—I shall be very much surprised and considerably disappointed. If you haven't seen it yet, by all means catch it at your neighborhood. And if you chance to be an exhibitor, demand it at the point of a gun.

Lewis Stone steps into the role of an artist whom love and circumstance have placed in a soap factory. Doris Kenyon portrays his wife. John Darrow is the son of the family, as interested in architecture as his father, in his youth, was immersed in art. Evalyn Knapp is the young woman whom he wishes to marry. From such commonplace incidents is evolved the story of the man who bought a house with an attic that permitted the North light, in the secret hope that he would one day paint. He achieves his ambition—and the dream of his life sells as a soap advertisement. How the younger generation faces the same problem, and how it is solved for them constitutes a tender, gripping story, relieved by the splendid work of Charles Butterworth and Una Merkel (she rapidly is rising in my estimation) who lend legitimate comedy to the central theme.

Robert Milton has directed this touching story with insight and understanding. It is from the Philip Barry play, *You and I*, adapted intelligently to the screen by Robert Presnell. *The Bargain* is not a super-production, but it achieves an effect that is far more convincing than most of the supers. The acting, individually and as a group, is as fine and well balanced a performance as I recently have seen. The ruthless logic of the story, the submerged tragedy which runs through it, and the good sense with which a thoroughly decent theme has been decently presented offers a very fair lesson to Hollywood. And it stands so high on my list of the season's favorites that I am bound to declare it a feather in the hat of the Warner Brothers.

Misleading Title

▼▼ *MY SIN*. When I entered the theatre to view this Paramount production I frankly expected to be bored to death. How, I reasoned, could a feature bearing such a fearful title contain anything of merit? And moreover, how could this Bankhead woman—whom I never before had seen—amount to much if she were billed as "The Flaming Symbol of Her Sex"? It was, I knew, going to be another one of those inane and utterly idiotic society affairs to which Paramount is devoting itself of late. My conclusions were all wrong.

The most impressive circumstance about the whole production is its absolute refusal to go maudlin. Perhaps this is due to the skilful direction of George Abbott. Perhaps it is the virtue of some obscure script writer. Or possibly it is because Miss Bankhead's personality is so vitally strong that she simply could not be used in the weepy over-tender sort of thing. At any rate the story progresses swiftly and inexorably to a proper climax without once wavering upon the tempting bypaths of sentimentalism. The audience is in doubt as to the conclusion until the last few feet of film, and the fade-out—praise heaven!—does not find the two lovers in a clinch.

This, I suppose, is ample recommendation for any picture. But there are other excellencies about this particular one. Fredric March gives a consummate interpretation of the drunkard who reforms to defend Miss Bankhead at her trial for murder. It is a role which I would not have expected March to fill so satisfactorily. Ann Sutherland and Harry Davenport turned in characterizations which seem to smack a little of the stage. In fact the greatest fault of the picture is its unwise reliance upon stage technic. But aside from that it is considerably above the Paramount average. A bit of direction by Abbott that pleased me: Tallulah leads a drunken chorus, but the chorus, instead of following her with the skill of an Episcopalian choir as is usually the case in even the most impromptu screen musical effort, falters occasionally, and waits twice for her to take up the melody before rushing in to join her. And an item that was overlooked: the checks which March carries in his wallet are crisp and unwrinkled six months later.

Where Is Diane?

▼▼ *MERELY MARY ANN* left me disappointed. Each time I see Janet Gaynor I look for a flash of the lovely *Diane*, and each time I leave the theatre more disillusioned than before. Which is not to say that Miss Gaynor is not the sweetest character on the screen to-day, for she is. But it seems to me that Henry King restricted her too severely in the part of the servant girl who inherits a million or so but almost loses her lover. Miss Gaynor has far greater capabilities for emotion than are permitted in the Zangwill story. Or at least as it was written by Jules Furthman and directed by King. I felt that the opus was outmoded, and that aside from the splendid supporting cast, the picture offered only the Gaynor-Farrell combination. Not once did I shed a tear, and when I see a Janet Gaynor picture and can't cry about it, I am downright mad.

I can shower laudations upon the head of Beryl Mercer without a single qualm of conscience. She is usually the hesitant timid mother, but in *Mary Ann* she blossoms out beautifully. As the gossiping proprietress of a rooming establishment she interprets the British lower class exactly as an American audience imagines that class to be. Whether or not the characterization is realistic I do not know. I can say only that it pleased me immensely. J. M. Kerrigan does much the same sort of thing as the cockney drayman. Lorna Balfour is delightful as the somewhat bovine young girl, and G. P. Huntley, Jr., who appears in a very brief role gave so splendid an account of himself that I can only hope to see him in a more important bit.

I can not understand why the same tenderness of sentiment is not to be derived from an American setting. The necessity of reviving something as old as *Mary Ann* is doubtful. There must be many writers in Hollywood who can see the possibilities of a *Seventh Heaven* with an American locale, with modern tempo, with present day problems confronting the principals. If they will write something of this sort and sell it to Fox

and if Janet Gaynor will spy it and insist upon playing it, *Diane* will live again for us who loved her.

Murder and Magic

▼▼ *THE SPIDER* presents Edmund Lowe in such a brilliant piece of work that I am wondering which producer is going to snap him up, now that the latest reports tell of his split with the Fox organization. I think of no actor, save Lionel Barrymore, who dominates the screen more completely. And when I mention the splendid work of Lois Moran in the same paragraph, the conclusion that she is a very talented young lady must be inescapable. Even Lowe could not completely efface her from my memory.

The filming of this play, which was adapted by Barry Conners and Philip Klein, must have required considerable skill, and it is evident that directors William Cameron Menzies and Kenneth MacKenna are not at all lacking in that quality. The sustained sequences wherein Lowe and Howard Phillips—a very personable young gentleman, by way of interpolation—try to locate the murderer who is seated in the audience before them, are tense and gripping when they very well might have been boring and ridiculous. The lighting effects and camera technic displayed in these scenes are striking. They are due largely to the skill of James Wong Howe.

And it must be remembered that the story as a play used the entire audience as members of the cast, whereas the motion picture version was necessarily forced to produce an audience on the screen. I think that those who saw the play will maintain that it was much better than the picture, although in this matter I am one of the great unlearned. Mr. Beaton in his review of *The Spider* sent plenty of ammunition in the direction of the comedy relief with which the production reeked. I can not make my agreement with him too emphatic. El Brendel does some very senseless stuff, and manages to break the continuity of every important scene. Considering the excellent impression I have of the story itself, I am wondering if *The Spider* might not have been one of the year's best mysteries if those in charge had not insisted upon spoiling it.

I Missed the Plot

▼▼ *MONKEY BUSINESS* is so absurdly amusing that it moves along without the aid of any plot whatsoever. That is a pretty good criterion of the amusement value with which it is filled. Groucho, Harpo, Chico and Zeppo dash through the picture from one impossible situation to another with such an amazing speed that director Norman McLeod must have been exhausted by the time the production was finished. There isn't any way of telling about it, but a gang threat runs vaguely through it and terminates in the kidnapping of Thelma Todd. The indomitable Marx Brothers effect a rescue and the picture is finished.

I don't know the title of the other Marx Brothers picture I saw, but as I recall, it was much cleverer than the present offering. Groucho's remarks were more pungent and more alive to the issues of the day. His farce on *Strange Interlude* was funny beyond endurance. The verve of that other production is somehow missing in the present one. I rather wish Groucho had commented on the depression, Hoover, the moratorium and Gandhi. He would probably have hit nearer home than our current crop of statesmen, and an audience which can't laugh such things off in the public prints could have howled itself to death over the very problems that threaten to drive it to the poorhouse. But I shouldn't complain, for *Monkey Business* is an uproarious picture.

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Disadvantage of Theatre Chains

(Abram F. Myers, Allied Exhibitor)

Those producers, having grown great by selling their product to the independent exhibitors, and forgetful of the precepts of their childhood, conceived the idea that still greater riches could be gained by purchasing all the independent houses, each acquiring a large chain, and then selling their pictures to each other. What these ambitious leaders did not realize was that in stamping out the exhibitors they assumed full responsibility for the enterprise; they had to supply all the capital, furnish all the ideas, assume all the risks, and, above all dwell in perfect harmony together. They failed to take account of the obvious disadvantages of living in a walled city including the fact that in trading in a circle it is not possible to sustain a policy of selling high and buying low, the approved formula for success in any sort of trade.

British Production Activity

(To-Day's Cinema, London)

Continuing the review of the coming year's product published during the first two days of this week, the feature most notable is the increase in British film production prospects. Not only are the leading British companies considerably increasing their programme, but the American companies, as announced from time to time, will definitely contribute an ever-increasing supply of British films. One of the most striking announcements is that of Wardour, who will make sufficient British films to release them at the rate of one a week.

A Church View

(Methodist Times, London)

There are millions of church-goers who might be picture-goers, and it is idiotic, in my opinion, for film producers to make a policy of alienating the churches by concentrating on gutter morals and the worst elements in public appeal.

I am unable to see any cause for congratulation in the fact that the cinema entertainment is wholly divorced from Christianity.

British Double Features

(Cinematograph Times, London)

Great Britain has been a land of double features, and in silent days the product available went round, as the various films would stand four or five runs in the competitive areas. To-day the life of a talkie seems limited to one or two runs in an area and, although there is a great deal of product, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make up a double-feature program in those areas where there are four or five competing houses.

Warner Output Banned

(Cinema, London)

A remarkable report from France states that the French Censor has decided to reject the whole of the films submitted by Warner Bros. The decision, it is rumored, has been imposed on the Censor by the Government following the showing in America of the film *Fifty Million Frenchmen*, the surprising contention being that this criticises French methods in the colonies.

Denunciation of Hollywood

(Abram F. Myers, Allied Exhibitor)

Exhibitors put themselves in a weak position when they engage in sweeping denunciations of Hollywood and the methods by which pictures are made. Hollywood has some faults sufficiently apparent to justify criticism from any source. Imitativeness, which leads to

the production of too many pictures of the same kind, is one. Bawdiness—the result of making pictures primarily for the downtown affiliated houses—is another. But generally Hollywood is doing a pretty good job.

Road to Prosperity

(Argonaut, San Francisco)

There is no royal road back to prosperity. It can not be accomplished by any overt act by anybody. The difficulty with us is not actual but mental. It can be dissipated not by any such concrete act as a reduction in wage scales or a miracle by the administration. It can only be accomplished by a recapture of confidence. Thus far confidence has eluded our spiritual net. In fact we don't know where to go chasing for it.

Sherwood's Remedy

(Robert E. Sherwood in Detroit Saturday Night)

There is only one thing that will ever stop it, and that is insufficiency of cash. As long as the Warner boys have access to enough currency to pay Constance Bennett's $30,000 a week salary, they will pay it, under the delusion that she is worth it— just as Metro-Goldwyn will pay its ornamental executive, Louis B. Mayer, $750,00 a year.

Entertainment For Kids

(Film Daily)

Out of one hundred ninety-four features currently being shown throughout the country, according to the *Parents' Magazine*, only twenty-eight per cent are fit for children and only forty-four per cent suitable for adolescents. This statement is made by George J. Hecht, publisher.

Getting Down to Points

(Kann in Motion Picture Daily)

We have speculated at length on whether it is the gang picture *per se* that has aroused criticism, or the flood of very bad ones that has glutted the market. It is our idea that treatment is the ingredient most sorely needed in connection with underworld stuff. If that is true, the job becomes one for Hollywood's vastly touted miracle men to perform. We think it can be done.

Labor and the Cinema

(To-Day's Cinema, London)

Never was it more important than now that the goodwill of the labor side of the industry should be retained, and that the citadel should not be divided against itself.

Wanted—the Common Denominator

(Creighton Peet in Outlook and Independent)

The big companies still cling blindly to the belief that one grade of film, shown to vastly differing audiences, will make everybody happy.

This Month's Scoop

(Wid's)

Normally Hollywood has a feeling that New York doesn't know what it's all about. Sometimes New York feels the same about Hollywood.

Reviewed in this Number

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BOUGHT—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Archie Mayo; story by Harriett Henry; adaptation and dialogue by Charles Kenyon and Raymond Griffith; photographed by Ray June; film editor, George Marks.

The cast: Constance Bennett, Ben Lyon, Richard Bennett, Dorothy Peterson, Raymond Milland, Doris Lloyd, Maude Eburne, Mae Madison, Clara Blandick, Arthur Stuart Hull, Edward J. Nugent, Paul Porcasi.

DEVOTION—

An RKO-Pathé picture; a Charles R. Rogers production. Directed by Robert Milton; from the novel, *A Little Flat in the Temple*, by Pamela Wynne; adaptation by Graham John and Horace Jackson; photographed by Hal Mohr; recording engineers, D. Cutler and H. Stine; musical director, Arthur Lange; art director, Carroll Clark; film editor, Dan Mandell; costume designer, Gwen Wakeling; assistant director, Gordon Hollingshead; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown.

The cast: Ann Harding, Leslie Howard, Robert Williams, O. P. Heggie, Louise Closser Hale, Dudley Digges, Allison Skipworth, Doris Lloyd, Ruth Weston, Joan Carr, Joyce Coad, Douglas Scott, Tempe Pigott, Forrester Harvey, Margaret Daily, Pat Somerset, Olive Tell, Claude King, Donald Stewart, Cyril Delevante.

GUILTY HANDS—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by W. S. Van Dyke; original screen story by Bayard Veiller; photographed by Merritt B. Gerstad; film editor, Anne Bauchens.

The cast: Lionel Barrymore, Kay Francis, Madge Evans, William Bakewell, C. Aubrey Smith, Polly Moran, Alan Mowbray, Forrester Harvey, Charles Crockett, Henry Barrows.

GOLDIE—

A Fox picture. Directed by Benjamin Stoloff; adaptation and dialogue by Gene Towne and Paul Perez; photographed by Ernest Palmer; recording engineer, Eugene Grossman; art director, Joe Wright; assistant director, Lou Breslow; film editor, Alexander Troffey; costumes by Polly Tree; associate producer, Al Rockett.

The cast: Spencer Tracy, Warren Hymer, Jean Harlow, Lina Basquette, Maria Alba, Eleanor Hunt, Lelia Karnelly, Ivan Linow, Jesse de Vorska, Eddie Kane.

GRAFT—

A Universal picture. Directed by Christy Cabanne; story, continuity and dialogue by Harry Barringer; photographed by J. Ash; recording engineer, C. Roy Hunter; film editor, Maurice Pivar.

The cast: Regis Toomey, Sue Carol, Dorothy Revier, George Irving, Richard Tucker, Boris Karloff, William Davidson, Willard Robertson.

HIGH STAKES—

A Radio picture. Directed by Lowell Sherman; original play by Willard Mack; screen play and dialogue by J. Walter Ruben; photographed by Roy Hunt; recording engineer, George Ellis; assistant directors, Eddie Killy and Harmon Waite; art director, Max Ree.

The cast: Lowell Sherman, Mae Murray, Edward Martindel, Karen Morley, Leyland Hodgson, Charles Coleman, Ethel Levey, Phillip Smalley, Maud Turner Gordon, Alan Roscoe.

LAST FLIGHT—

A First National picture. Directed by William Dieterle; story and adaptation by John Monk Saunders; photographed by Sid Hickox; film editor, Al Hall.

The cast: Richard Barthelmess, John Mack Brown, Helen Chandler, Walter Byron, Elliott Nugent, David Manners.

MAD PARADE—

A Herman M. Gumbin picture, released by Paramount. Directed by William Beaudine; from the original play by Gertrude Orr and Doris Malloy; dialogue by Henry McCarthy and Frank R. Conklin; assistant director, Gene Anderson; production manager, Sidney Algier; photographed by Charles van Enger, Glenn Kerschner and Ernie Miller; recording engineer, William Fox; sound, R. C. Clayton; effects by Carl Hernandez; film editor, Richard Cahoon; settings by Charles Cadwallader.

The cast: Evelyn Brent, Irene Rich, Louise Fazenda, Lilyan Tashman, Marceline Day, Fritzi Ridgeway, June Clyde, Elizabeth Keating, Helen Keating.

MERELY MARY ANN—

A Fox picture. Directed by Henry King; story by Israel Zangwill; screen play by Jules Furthman; photographed by John Seitz; recording engineer; E. Clayton Ward; assistant director, Charles Woolstenhulme; settings by William Darling.

The cast: Janet Gaynor, Charles Farrell, Beryl Mercer, G. P. Huntley, Jr., J. M. Kerrigan, Tom Whitely, Lorna Balfour, Arnold Lucy.

MONKEY BUSINESS—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Norman McLeod; from the story by Sam Perelman and Will B. Johnstone; dialogue by Arthur Sheekman; photographed by Arthur Todd.

The cast: Groucho Marx, Harpo Marx, Zeppo Marx, Chico Marx, Ruth Hall, Thelma Todd, Tom Kennedy, Harry Woods, Rockliffe Fellowes.

MORALS FOR WOMEN—

A Tiffany picture. Directed by Mort Blumenstock; story by Frances Hyland; dialogue by Gene Lewis; photographed by Max Dupont; recording engineer, J. Stransky, Jr.; film editor, Martin Cohn; recorded by R. C. A. Photophone System.

The cast: Bessie Love, Conway Tearle, John Holland, Emma Dunn, David Rollins, Edmund Breese, Lina Basquette, Natalie Moorehead, Virginia Lee Corbin, Otis Harlan, Wilbur Higby, Walter Perry, Crauford Kent.

MY SIN—

A Paramount picture. Directed by George Abbott; based upon a story by Fred Jackson; screen play by Owen Davis and Adelaide Heilbron; photographed by George Folsey.

The cast: Tallulah Bankhead, Fredric March, Harry Davenport, Scott Kolk, Anne Sutherland, Margaret Adams, Lily Cahill, Jay Fassett, Charles Fang.

NIGHT LIFE IN RENO—

Produced by Supreme Pictures Corp. Directed by Raymond Cannon.

The cast: Virginia Valli, Jameson Thomas, Dixie Lee, Arthur Housman, Clarence Wilson, Pat O'Malley.

PARDON US—

A Hal Roach picture, released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by James Parrott; dialogue by H. M. Walker; photographed by Jack Stevens; recording engineer, Elmer Raguse; film editor, Richard Currier.

The cast: Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Wilfred Lucas, Walter Long, June Marlowe, James Finlayson.

PERSONAL MAID—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Monta Bell; story by Grace Perkins; adaptation by Adelaide Heilbron; photographed by Carl Freund; recording engineer, C. A. Tuthull; film editor, Arthur Ellis.

The cast: Nancy Carroll, Pat O'Brien, Gene Raymond, Mary Boland, George Fawcett, Hugh O'Connell.

RECKLESS LIVING—

A Universal picture, produced by Carl Laemmle, Jr. Directed by Cyril Gardner; from the play, *On the Up and Up*, by Eva K. Flint and Martha Madison; screen play by Courtenay Terrett; adaptation by Tom Reed; supervising scenario editor, Richard Schayer; photographed by Jackson J. Rose; recording engineer, C. Roy Hunter; dialogue director, Perry Ivins; art director, Walter R. Koessler; film editor, Harry W. Lieb; editorial supervisor, Maurice Pivar; associate producer, E. M. Asher.

The cast: Ricardo Cortez, Mae Clarke, Norman Foster, Marie Prevost, Slim Summerville, Robert Emmett O'Connor, Thomas Jackson, Louis Natheaux, Murray Kinnell, Russell Hopton, Perry Ivins, Brooks Benedict.

ROAD TO SINGAPORE—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Alfred E. Green; based on the play by Roland Pertwee; from a story by Denise Robins; screen play and dialogue by J. Grubb Alexander; photographed by Bob Kurrle; film editor, Bill Holmes.

The cast: William Powell, Doris Kenyon, Marian Marsh, Louis Calhern, Lumsden Hare, Ethel Griffies, Alison Skipworth, A. E. Anson, Douglas Gerrard.

SIDE SHOW—

A Warner Brothers picture. Directed by Roy del Ruth; story by Will K. Wells; screen play by Arthur Caesar and Raymond Enright; photographed by Dev Jennings; film editor, Jim Gibbons.

The cast: Winnie Lightner, Evalyn Knapp, Louis Alberni, Charles Butterworth, Donald Cook, Fred Kelsey.

SKYLINE—

A Fox picture. Directed by Sam Taylor; based on Felix Riesenberg's novel, *East Side, West Side;* screen play and dialogue by Kenyon Nicholson and Dudley Nichols; photographed by John Mescal; recording engineer, W. W. Lindsay; art director, Duncan Cramer; associate producer, John W. Considine, Jr.

The cast: Thomas Meighan, Hardie Albright, Maureen O'Sullivan, Stanley Fields, Myrna Loy, Donald Dillaway, Jack Kennedy, Alice Ward, Irene Hunt, Robert McWade, Dorothy Peterson.

SOB SISTER—

A Fox picture. Directed by Alfred Santell; from the novel by Mildred Gilman; screen play by Edwin Burke; photographed by Glenn MacWilliams; recording engineer, George Leverett; assistant director, Marty Santell.

The cast: James Dunn, Linda Watkins, Molly O'Day, Minna Gombell, George E. Stone, Charles Middleton, Eddie Dillon, Howard Phillips, Ernie Wood, Lex Lindsay, Harold Waldridge, Neal Burns, Russ Powell, Harry Beresford, Sarah Padden, George Byron, Lucille Ward, Edwin Sturgis, Maurice Black.

SPIRIT OF NOTRE DAME—

A Universal picture. Directed by Russell Mack; screen play by Richard Schayer and Dale Van Every; added dialogue by Walter de Leon; photographed by George Robinson; recording engineer, C. Roy Hunter; art director, Danny Hall; film editor, Robert Carlisle; editorial supervisor, Maurice Pivar; production supervisor, Richard Schayer; produced by Carl Laemmle, Jr.

The cast: Lew Ayres, William Bakewell, Frank Carideo, Andy Devine, Harry Barris, J. Farrell MacDonald, The Four Horsemen—Don Miller, Elmer Layden, Jim Crowley, Harry Stuhldreher—Nat Pendleton, Sally Blane, Adam Walsh, Bucky O'Connor, John Law, Moon Mullins, Art McMannon, Al Howard, John O'Brien.

THE BARGAIN—

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture. Directed by Robert Milton; from the Philip Barry play, *You and I;* adaptation by Robert Presnell; photographed by Sol Polito; film editor, Jack Rawlins.

The cast: Lewis Stone, Evalyn Knapp, Charles Butterworth, Doris Kenyon, John Darrow, Oscar Apfel, Una Merkel.

THE SPIDER—

A Fox picture. Directed by William Cameron Menzies and Kenneth MacKenna; from the play by Fulton Oursler and Lowell Brentano; continuity and dialogue by Barry Conners and Philip Klein; photographed by James Wong Howe; recording engineer, Alfred Bruzlin; assistant director, R. L. Selander; associate producer, William Sistrom.

The cast: Edmund Lowe, Lois Moran, El Brendel, John Arledge, George E. Stone, Earle Foxe, Howard Phillips, Manya Roberti, Kendall McComas, Purnell Pratt, William Pawley, Jesse de Vorska, Warren Hymer, Ruth Donnelly.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS—

A Paramount picture. Directed by Marion Gering; screen play by Louis Weitzenkorn; based on the novel by Louis Bromfield and the play by William C. Lengle and Lew Levenson; photographed by Ernest Haller.

The cast: Clive Brook, Kay Francis, Miriam Hopkins, Regis Toomey, George Barbier, Adrienne Ames, Charlotte Granville, Minor Watson, Lucille La Verne, Wade Boteler, Robert Kortman, Malcolm Waite.

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